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MEXICAN BILL

THE COWBOY DETECTIVE

BY
"NEVADA NED." ps.
Author of "The King of Gold," "Convict 72," Etc
E. O. Tilburn

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CONTENTS.

PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER. PAGE.

I.—The Murder on the Chihuahua Trail - - - - - - 7

II.—An Infant's Wail - - - 13

THE STORY.

I.—Mexican Bill - - - - 19

II.—The Story of Three Brothers 28

III.—An Attack by Bandits - - 36

IV.—A Mysterious Interview - - 45

V.—Valuable Information - - 55

VI.—The Missing Girl - - - 63

VII.—"In the Hands of the Philistines" - - - - - - 70

VIII.—The Scheme Develops Itself - 75

IX.—Scheme Number Two - - - 89

X.—Warned—Scheme Number Three 96

XI.—The Arrival of Mordaunt Daggett - - - - - - 106

XII.—The Secret of the Tin Box - 114

XIII.—The Flight—The Pursuit - - 122

XIV.—The Battle in the Mountains - 129

XV.—Bartholomew and Bassett - 136

XVI.—Dirty Antonio's Treachery - 144

XVII.—Saved from Death - - - 151

XVIII.—The Repulse of the Bandits - 158

XIX.—Millicent's Peril - - - 167

XX.—A Startling Revelation - - 176

XXI.—Conclusion - - - - - 185

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MEXICAN BILL

PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER ON THE CHIHUAHUA TRAIL.

THE blazing sun of August is shining, burning upon the dusty trail which extends far across the dry, almost withered, prairie as far as the eye can reach — the Chihuahua trail.

The stillness of death reigns supreme over all. Not a sound of life is heard, and a chance observer of this scene of desolate solitude would, from the unpleasant feeling of loneliness, oppressive heat, and general desertion of everything of life, plainly discernible, put spurs to his pony and leave it far behind him.

But this unattractive spot is soon to be the scene of horrible crime, of man's insatiate passion for that glittering metal, for the possession of which thousands have sacrificed every noble feeling, every qualm of outraged conscience ; sold even their very souls — gold !

The afternoon is already far advanced. In a few short hours the burning king of the heavens will sink into the western horizon, and the parched earth will feel the relief from his fierce presence. The withered grasses will look up to the sky, absorbing the dews with grateful thankfulness.

But the sun has not yet set. He is to be the silent observer of a scene of bloodshed. See! Far to the east a faint cloud appears — not in the sky, but from the earth — a cloud of blinding dust; and soon after, another in the west.

An experienced scout would say that two parties are approaching each other, two mounted parties, and that the dust is driven into the air from the hoofs of their horses coming in contact with the dry earth.

The surmise would be correct, for two parties are drawing near each other. They must meet in an hour, and pass each other on the trail. As yet, each is unaware of the proximity of the other, as they are some miles apart; and so, while waiting for the meeting which must soon take place, we will approach the cloud of dust which appears in the east, and observe the approach of those who are as yet unknown, and whose ponies are the cause of the disturbance of the loose, dry sand.

Two men. The first, mounted on a small broncho, is a man of apparently thirty years of age. The expression of his face is one of eagerness mixed with anxiety; the dark eyes are fixed upon the ground with a look of unutterable melancholy. He is not observing how painfully the little beast he is riding is panting, how the worn-out, weary limbs of the pony tremble, as with difficulty he proceeds upon his way; he only sees the prairie beneath him, clutches tightly with one hand the bridle rein, while with the other he holds in their place upon the saddle before him four bags of some weighty substance.

"Oh, God; if I should be too late!" is the thought that surges through his fevered brain.

The other is a man much older; a man whose pale face expresses both weariness and fear. With a trembling hand he wipes the beads of perspiration from his forehead, mentally cursing the intense heat, wondering how long he will be able to bear up under it.

But he follows on after the other, urging his pony to greater exertion when the jaded beast shows signs of relaxing from the gallop which he has been obliged to keep up for hours.

It is a mission of life or death that causes these two to hurry on through the burning heat of this August afternoon. They must keep on as long as their ponies can stand upon their limbs. Even if they fall dead in their tracks, they must urge them on, for their death is but little matter — the life of another depends upon their exertions.

Yes, a mission of life or death; for that anxious man guards, that weary pony carries, the price of a woman's life — a ransom for a beloved wife.

The man upon the first pony is Hugh Daggett; he who follows him, his servant, Peter Daniels.

Hugh Daggett is one of three brothers, the sons of Algernon Daggett, a wealthy manufacturer of Birmingham, England. He has had the misfortune to displease his father, by wedding one beneath him, as the father thinks, the beautiful but poor child of a low-class inn-keeper. They have quarreled, father and son, and, the independent spirit of the young man asserting itself, he has left his father's house, bringing his young wife to America, accompanied by the servant who has been his friend since boyhood.

They have come West, and one night, while encamped, they are attacked by a party of bandits, led by the cruel Juan Valdoso. The wife is taken into captivity, and the frantic young husband told that if, inside of two weeks, he cannot produce five thousand dollars in gold, she will be put to death. The loving husband has been allowed to go for the money. He has that sum deposited in a bank at Santa Fé; has left it there for safe keeping, until he has finished prospecting and settled down.

So, accompanied by the servant, Daniels, he hurries to Santa Fé.

It will leave him a poor man — the payment of this money — but the wife he loves is more to him than all the wealth of the universe. He is now on his way to pay the price of his wife's ransom. The time allotted expires at midnight of this day, and he knows that the hard-hearted monster who has terrorized the country will keep his word. So hurry on, good ponies. Do not relax your efforts. The sweet young wife must be saved. The husband's heart must be made glad again. With an effort, the servant urges his pony to his master's side.

"I 'ope we will be in time, sir," he says, wiping his forehead.

"Pray, Peter! Pray God that it may be so," answers the master.

"I 'as been prayin', sir, for hours. But we 'as a long way yet, sir, an' the sun is unpleasantly 'ot. I don't know as 'ow the ponies stand it, sir."

"They *must* stand it! Even if they drop dead beneath us, we must hurry on. Oh God! My wife!" and he puts the spurs to the jaded beast. Daniels drops behind his master again, his aged face looking sad and fearful. His weary eyes scan the horizon.

What is it that awakens that look of interest in their faded depths? *A cloud of dust!*

He calls his master's attention to it.

Hugh Daggett shades his eyes with one hand, anxious, disturbed. "Some one is approaching us," he says, a feeling of fear piercing his heart.

But he does not slacken the pace of his pony. Friends or enemies, they must be encountered, and, with a fervent prayer to Heaven, he hurries on.

In a short time the approaching party can be discerned plainly, and, with a sinking feeling at heart, the husband recognizes them. He knows the gaudy, dust-stained costume. He remembers some of the fierce faces. They are a part of Valdoso's band. The foremost he recognizes as Pietro Alvarez, Valdoso's lieutenant, a man as bloodthirsty and cruel as his master, and he is accompanied by four of the worst members of the cut-throat band.

"What can they want?" flashes through his mind.

Further thought is rendered impossible, as the party is upon him, Alvarez riding up to his side.

"Ha, señor! You have got the ransom? My chief has sent me out to meet you, to see that you did not break faith by bringing a company of soldiers with you. Not that he fears them. No, no! Ha, ha! We have had many encounters with them; but, to be sure, we would not be surprised."

The black-visaged lieutenant reins in his rearing pony, and rides by the side of the anxious man.

"Yes; I have the ransom," he answers, looking about him fearfully.

"Good; and to-night you can take your pretty little wife, and go your way. Ride on. We will ride behind you, guard you. Ride on."

The husband, hurrying to her he loves better than life, feels somewhat easier in his mind. Evidently this man is speaking truthfully. He has been sent out by Valdoso to guard against accident or breach of faith. So he rides on in advance of the others.

He does not know that the villain Alvarez has lied; does not know that he and his companion have come out to meet him, to possess themselves of the gold which is to ransom the beloved one in the midst of such great danger.

For once, at least, the hackneyed saying, that "there is honor among thieves," is radically wrong; for Alvarez is about to prove treacherous to his

“Two pistol shots ring out on the air.”

MEXICAN BILL—Page 13.

master, and is only waiting until the two men are off their guard to possess himself of the gold.

The time comes. Two pistol-shots ring out on the air, two cries to Heaven, as master and man throw up their hands to the sky, and fall headlong from their saddles to the parched earth. Then, with a triumphant cry, the murderers ride down the startled pony which bears the gold, and, dividing it, gallop off to the east.

The sun shines on calmly, majestically, to the western horizon, and sinks, red as the crimson tide which dyes the parched earth, where lie two murdered ones. Night comes on apace.

The moon rises, her mellow reflection shining upon the Chihuahua trail — upon two ghastly faces upturned to the sky.

CHAPTER II.

AN INFANT'S WAIL.

THE flickering, uncertain light of a rude lamp faintly illumes the interior of a wild, weird cavern; throws its feeble rays upon the stone walls, draped with the skins of wild animals, and the blankets made by that strange race, the Navajoes, rich fabrics, priceless in value; reflects upon two of human kind, both of the gentle sex, but as widely at variance as day and night—one, a withered old hag, who rocks to and fro upon a low stool, crooning some quaint melody to herself, while she watches the varying expressions upon the countenance of the other, a girl of divine beauty, who lies upon a bed of skins near her.

The motionless one upon the couch faintly moans in her slumbers, for she is sleeping. The parted lips form one word, "Hugh." She is dreaming. Suddenly she awakens. With fearful, wild eyes, she glances about the place, and, remembering where she is, closes her eyes, with a deep-drawn sigh. She lies perfectly still for the instant; then, with an effort, turns on her side, and murmurs:

"My husband — has he returned?"

The hag ceases her monotonous chant, and, without changing her position, mumbles, in broken English:

"No see him; he come, deary; never fret."

"Oh that it may be soon!" she murmurs.

Poor child, your husband is lying far out on the prairie, his loving heart stilled in death; his sightless eyes raised to the moonlit sky.

She lies, with her radiant eyes fixed upon the roof of the cave. She is suffering great pain, but bravely keeps it to herself; only waiting, only praying, that he, her husband, may reach her in time. If he fails, she must die; and to die without seeing him, without feeling the clasp of his loving arm — it is horrible. She turns her head; she cannot think of it.

The blankets which form the entrance to the cave are rudely thrust aside. Some one is entering; but she does not show by any sign that she observes it.

It is the chief of the band, Juan Valdoso, and he is followed by a woman of rare beauty — a woman whose raven black hair falls in heavy masses to her waist; a woman clothed in rich, barbaric magnificence.

The man strides to the side of the couch.

"Is she awake?" he asks, in Spanish, of the crone, who does not move at his entrance.

"Yes; awake, and thinking of her loved one," comes the answer, also in the same tongue.

"She had better think of him," he answers, brutally, "for, if he is not here in an hour, she dies."

The woman who has followed him in, now approaches the couch. She looks down upon the pale, beautiful face.

"It is cruel," she murmurs. "O Juan, he may be delayed a few hours. Give her some respite."

The man turns upon her. "I am master here, Pepita," he says; "I never break my word. If the man is not here in one hour, she dies."

His voice has, unconsciously, increased in volume as he speaks the last words. The suffering creature opens her eyes. "Has he come?" she asks, feebly, but oh, so hopelessly.

"No, señora," answers she who has been called Pepita. "There is an hour yet."

An hour — sixty short minutes! She lies, and counts away five of them. Only fifty-five now. "Oh hasten my husband to me," she murmurs.

The bandit looks down upon her suspiciously.

"You are sure your husband has this money in Santa Fé?" he asks.

"Yes! yes! It was to have purchased stock for the little home we were looking for," she answers, wearily. She knows that the little stock farm will have to wait if this money is paid.

"Well, he had better hurry, or it will be too late."

The hard-hearted wretch speaks plainly in English. The young creature hears him, and understands his meaning.

She makes an effort to rise from the couch; but a spasm of pain overcomes her, and she falls back with a moan.

The old hag runs to her. "You had better leave her," she says, in a low, warning tone.

"Leave her! Why?"

The woman Pepita is by her side, bending over the sick one. She looks up, her dark eyes flashing. "You brute! Can you not comprehend?" she cries.

The black-visaged villain scowls. "I begin to understand," he mumbled. "But, remember; no matter what happens, if he is not here, she dies."

Pepita springs to her feet. She faces him, and cries, in her native tongue: "God may see fit, in His wisdom, to rob you of your victim; to place her beyond ransom."

A startled look comes to the eyes of the man. "Do you think she is likely to die?" he cries.

"It may be. Go. Your presence will do more toward killing her than anything else."

With an imperious gesture the woman point to the entrance, and, with a scowl and a muttered curse, the bandit king leaves the cave.

The sufferings of the woman upon the couch are terrible to behold. With wide staring eyes, she writhes in agony untold. The minutes speed by. Still the husband does not come; still the wife suffers, until at last, with a cry that echoes through the place, with one last agonizing convulsion, the loved wife of Hugh Daggett stretches out her white, beautiful arms. The pale lips part, and, with the name on her lips of him for whom she is waiting, him who is deaf to her cries, she falls back on the couch.

"Hugh, darling, I come!"

She is dead.

Two women bend over her. One takes something from the woman's side, and wraps it carefully in a soft skin.

The chief enters the cave.

"The hour has come!" he cries.

He stops, and looks upon the scene before him; stops and gazes, spell-bound, at the burden the hag is holding in her arms; hears that which moves him, heartless villain that he is — an infant's wail; the feeble, pitiful cry of a new-born babe for its mother. The woman Pepita looks up into the face of the chief.

"God has spared you the sin of her death!" she says. "He has taken her. See — this is the mother's ransom."

There are tears in her eyes.

He turns and strides from the cave.

With tender care the woman prepares food for the child, who, feeling satisfied, smiles.

Poor fatherless, motherless waif, smiling at its mother in Heaven.

THE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

MEXICAN BILL.

WHIR-R-R — ding!

The electric annunciator sounds with emphatic distinctness.

The clerk, who has been standing in the door of the hotel, turns to the indicator, and murmurs, "No. 28," and then strikes the large bell upon the desk, to summon the bell-boy.

"No. 28," he says, as that worthy makes his appearance.

Number 28 is upon the floor above, and the bell-boy (a man, in point of years) hurries to the room and taps upon the door.

It opens, disclosing the smooth-shaven face of a middle-aged man, with evident impatience depicted on every lineament of his shrewd, cunning countenance.

"You rang, sir?"

"Yes; has there been any one inquiring for me?"

"Name, sir?"

"Bartholomew — Alexander Bartholomew."

"I can't say, sir. I'll go see," and he turns to go. The man calls after him:

"If any one has been here, see if they left any message; if any one *should* happen to call, show 'em up. Don't stop to bother about cards and all that sort of thing; show 'em up at once. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The door closes; the man hurries down-stairs. He finds that Alexander Bartholomew has been the only arrival by the last train, and that no one has called to see him.

He takes the information to that gentleman.

"No one at all, eh? What time does your next train arrive?"

"Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fé, at three twenty-two; the others ——"

"Never mind the others; that is the one I am interested in. You may go."

The man goes, and Bartholomew looks at his watch, a large, open-faced gold affair, looking as clean and methodical as its owner.

"Two fifty-one," he mutters. "He will surely be here on the next train. I rather thought he would be here before me; but it seems I got here first."

He restores the timepiece to its resting-place, immediately over his capacious stomach, and, taking a chair, draws it up to the table, and begins the reading of several letters which he takes from his pocket.

Evidently the perusal of these epistles affords him much pleasure, for he smiles in a self-satisfied manner, and replaces them in his coat.

"This promises to be a well-paying case for me," he chuckles; "shows the effect of judicious advertising. If I had not sent that little 'ad' to the London papers, I would not have had this case. Ah, it is a good idea to let your light shine out before you, and not cover it with a bushel," and he chuckles again.

Alexander Bartholomew is a well-to-do lawyer of San Francisco. Shrewd, cunning, he makes the most of every one and everything. His cordial greeting, his pleasant smile, have secured him hosts of well-paying clients. His favorite saying, "politeness costs nothing," has been fully exemplified in his daily actions. He believes it, and uses plenty of that rare commodity, which, although so cheap, is disregarded by many. He also reasons, that every man has a flattering opinion of himself, and never forgets to appeal to that side of man's character. "More flies can be caught by molasses than vinegar," he has been heard to remark, and his manner has never belied his firm faith in that old but very true saying. He advertises extensively, and it has been the means of bringing him in a plentiful harvest.

He has never been considered altogether unscrupulous, this man; but he never allows a little misrepresentation of facts to stand in the way of business.

He has made it a rule to always understand the most minute details of every case he has been called upon to officiate in. That is, he has given his clients to believe that he understood, whether he did or not.

It is a comparatively easy matter to lead an ignorant one to believe you well posted, as, in their ignorance, they cannot contradict you, and a wise look, a cunning wink of the eye, will convey much without meaning anything.

Such a man is Alexander Bartholomew, attorney at law; he is aroused from his pleasant reverie by a double knock upon the door.

"My man!" he cries, and opens it.

"Gentleman to see you," announces the bell-boy, and hurries down the hall.

Bartholomew, with a broad smile, bids his visitor enter.

The stranger, who has been hidden by the bell-boy, bows and accepts the invitation.

He is a very short man; a very thin man, and a very quiet man.

Draped neatly, with small, well-trimmed side whiskers, he looks like a school-boy masquerading, for in stature he is not above five feet; but he is not a boy, either in years or brain, for the quick, nervous eye, the corrugated forehead, show a man of thought; one quick to observe and retain.

"This is Mr. Bartholomew," he says, with a quaint smile.

“Just so, and you are Mr. Bassett.”

“Isaac Bassett, at your service.”

“Sit down. I have been expecting you, shall I say with eagerness? your letters have conveyed to me the man of business; short, concise, but to the point. Ah! I love such letters, Mr. Bassett. No wandering all over creation. No going around Robin Hood’s barn to convey their meaning, but coming right to the point.”

“My time is too valuable to wander, sir. Time is really money to me.”

“True, true; but you have doubtless observed, Mr. Bassett, that the majority of the world are sorely extravagant.”

“Yes; but to business.” This quickly, a little impatiently. “You have looked up this matter?”

“Yes; but have little information to impart. Your letters merely gave me an outline to work on. I have gone as far as I could. If I had known more, I should have been placed in a position to have extended my researches.”

“What have you discovered?”

“Simply a corroboration of what you wrote me — that the party had come West, but had never been heard of since. I learned this much, however — that on the twelfth day of August, 1860, a man by the name you wrote me drew five thousand dollars from the Santa Fé National Bank, and had gone, taking it with him.”

“Ah! So he had money here.”

“Yes; had deposited it about two weeks previous to the time he withdrew it.”

"That is something, at any rate," musingly.

"I had some thoughts of engaging a detective, as I could not conveniently leave my business for any great length of time to follow up the case; but I thought it best to wait until you arrived, as you wrote me you would soon follow your last communication, and so I did not engage one. I might say, I have spoken to one."

Ah! you have? Is he a man who would be likely to prove of service?"

"The best man I know of. I believe he would move Heaven and earth to ferret out a mystery." The lawyer speaks eagerly.

"Such a man would be of great assistance. Can you lay your hand on him when you want him?"

"I have provided for that. I thought that perhaps you might feel the advisability of engaging such a man, and so I took the liberty of making an appointment with him. He will be here to-day. In fact, I expect him every minute."

"Good. You have taken an interest in the case. I am glad. I determined to employ your services. The name of this man ——"

"Is unknown — that is, his full name. Like many of the wild, daring spirits who abound in our western country, he bears a sobriquet — that of Mexican Bill. Part of his life has been passed as what is termed here a cow-puncher or cowboy; in fact, a herder of the vast flocks which graze upon our open prairies. He has given that up, however, but is thought to be still connected with a band of these brave, daring fellows, who render him valuable assistance in case of battle with the bandits which infest our border, against whom he has waged bitter warfare for the past year or so. He is called the cowboy detective."

" A peculiar sort of individual."

" Decidedly. One who would startle your prim, methodical English police, but a man we can trust. There is not in the United States a man more daring, more indefatigable than this man Mexican Bill; and you have only to look into his honest eye to be convinced that he is the soul of honor and a gentleman; not what is strictly known by that name in fashionable circles, perhaps, but still a true exponent of what the word implies in itself. In fact, a western gentleman."

" Thank you for your words of praise, Mr. Bartholomew. They say listeners never hear any good of themselves. I am an exception, I can see."

The words sound melodiously and full behind them. They both turn, and Mr. Bassett gives utterance to a cry of surprise and admiration as he beholds him who has just spoken to them.

A man, probably of five-and-twenty, straight as an arrow, dark as a Spaniard, with long, flowing black hair rippling over his broad shoulders nearly to his waist, clad in a riding costume of dark corduroy, with high boots, which come above his knees; a high, broad forehead; eyes firm, determined, soulful and gentle; an aquiline nose, seeming as if chiseled out of fine granite, so straight, so undeviating is its outline. A heavy, curling black mustache hides the sensitive, manly mouth, which, open and smiling now, discloses a set of even white teeth. The collar of his blue flannel shirt is open at the neck, rolling back from the full throat, being held in place by a gold star, in which is set a diamond of purest water, but not of unusual size. As he walks toward Alexander Bartholomew, the rowels of his large Mexican spurs clank musically.

" Mexican Bill," cries the lawyer, rising from his chair, and grasping the outstretched hand.

" No other," answered the newcomer. " I have come to keep my appointment."

" Just in time, too. Allow me, Mr. Bassett; this is Mexican Bill, the best shot, the most reckless rider, the keenest detective in the West."

" Don't pile it on too thick," smiles the hero.

" Mexican Bill, this is Mr. Isaac Bassett, of London, England; one of the shrewdest lawyers of Great Britain."

The two men bow; Bill gracefully, Mr. Bassett with punctilious politeness, first casting a look of annoyance at his portly confrére. He does not like flattery, this man. " Be seated sir," he says, the introduction being over.

The detective takes the chair offered him.

" Mr. Bartholomew has been recommending you highly, sir," the Englishman began.

" I overheard part of it," interrupts the detective. " Rather too much, I think."

" That remains to be seen," says the lawyer. " If you are the man Mr. Bartholomew claims, you are just the man I want. The case I am in America to attend to is rather a peculiar one, and will require the skill of an experienced man to ferret out. There is very little to work on; that is the hardest part of it; but still it may be enough. The pay will be sufficiently remunerative to spur on any one, and, if you think you would like to undertake the case, why, I should be pleased to have you do so."

"Just so," cries Mr. Bartholomew. "He must have his word."

The detective turns with an easy gesture, and looks the little lawyer in the eyes.

"For some years past, Mr. Bassett, I have devoted myself to the hunting of criminals, and ferreting out mysteries. I have always met with success, for I believe that, in order to thoroughly understand these things, a man must think, and so I think. I study whys and wherefores, and generally come to some conclusion, usually the correct one. Now, if you will kindly tell me what I am to do, I will try and do it, if it is honorable. Make it short. Cut out the big words, because I don't understand them, and I will start in just as soon as you say. The sooner the better, for there ain't anything made by dilly-dallying and tom foolery."

So saying, the handsome detective waits for the lawyer to begin.

"You are right, sir; and, in order that you can thoroughly understand what you are to do, I will give the full and complete facts of the case."

And, composing himself comfortably in his chair, the diminutive lawyer slowly begins the story of his mission; the portly Bartholomew listening eagerly; the detective quietly and thoughtfully.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF THREE BROTHERS.

"In the year of '59 Algernon Daggett, one of England's most prosperous iron manufacturers, died, leaving his vast property to his three sons — Hugh, Trevylyn and Arthur. The words of the will (which I had the honor of drawing up) were to the effect that the money was to be evenly divided between the three, or, in case of the death of either, the share of that one was to go to the nearest surviving relative. But the legatee must, in person, receive the money, and, in case of reputed death, positive proof must be furnished of the decease. Nothing very difficult to conform with the provisos of this will, you might say; but, when I inform you that for twenty-five long years that money has remained at interest, undivided, you will agree with me that it is a decidedly difficult matter to do so. Why? From this fact:

"Three months previous to the death of the father, one of the sons — the youngest, Hugh — married, against his father's wishes, the daughter of a low character, the keeper of a common public house. They quarreled, father and son, and the young man left his father's house, vowing that he would never return. He never did.

"The boy disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up; and the old man, regretting his hasty words, having expended large sums of money without result, became overcome with grief — sorrow so intense that it ended his life. In making his will, but a few weeks before his death, he was very particular to have it worded so that neither of the remaining brothers could inherit any portion of his fabulous wealth without the younger and best beloved also receiving his share. "He will be found some day," he said, "and his father's gold will assure him of his father's forgiveness." After the death of the old man the sons came forward with another will which left the property to each, share and share alike, without the proviso contained in the other and later one. And, when I produced the last will and testament of the old man, they raised a great hue and cry.

" 'What have we to do with Hugh?' they cried. 'We have a right to our share of the property, whether he chooses to come and claim his or not.' I explained that, according to their father's wishes, as exemplified in his will, they could not claim a penny unless Hugh was found, or proven dead. They tested the validity of the document; but, after carrying it from one court to another for years, they finally gave it up, and began, what they should have done in the first place, to advertise for the brother. But the most persistent efforts in this direction were productive of no results. Hugh Daggett could not be found.

"In the meantime, Trevylyn, the oldest son, died, and the only remaining one, Arthur, gave up the search, trusting to fate to unravel what the most persistent efforts of man had failed to do, namely, the mystery surrounding the youngest brother's disappearance. Trevylyn Daggett had been married, but his wife did not long survive her husband, and so the property of the eldest son of Algernon Daggett fell to *his* son, Mordaunt, who, at the time of the death of his parents, was about five years of age. He was taken by his uncle Arthur, and brought up in his own family, together with his young daughter, Millicent.

"The years passed. Mordaunt and Millicent had reached the age of twenty. (They were nearly of the same age.) Hugh Daggett had been nearly forgotten, when a circumstance occurred which again aroused interest in the affair, namely, the death of Hugh Daggett's wife's father. Two days after his decease a letter came through the post, in his handwriting, to Arthur, in which he stated that he knew where the missing man had gone, but had kept the knowledge to himself, through the feeling of hatred he bore the Daggetts; but, as he was on his deathbed, he had come to the conclusion that a dying man should not cherish malice, and so he would tell what he knew. He had received a letter from his daughter about a year after the disappearance of the young man, written at Chicago, in which she said that her husband was going West. Another letter, some weeks later, announced the arrival at Santa Fé, New Mexico, and that was the last he had heard from her.

" He gave the information for what it was worth, and hoped it might not be too late to find the missing man and his wife.

" The story of his grandfather's will had been kept from young Mordaunt; but now everything was told him, and, his cupidity aroused, the young man spurred on his uncle to fresh endeavor. Again the papers of the world were brought into requisition, offering large rewards for information of Hugh Daggett or his heirs. But four years were passed without success, until, one day, a letter arrived, carefully worded, in which the writer stated that he could, if liberally paid, give some very valuable information. This letter came from the United States, postmarked Las Vegas, New Mexico, and signed Pietro Alvarez."

A sudden cry from the detective interrupted the speaker.

" Alvarez! I knew him well. He is dead now."

" So I have already ascertained. We investigated the matter; wrote Alvarez, but received no further communication from him In the columns of the San Francisco *Leader* I saw the advertisement of our friend here, Mr. Bartholomew, and, also seeing him well spoken of in some other American and English papers as a man of integrity and perseverance, I wrote him, thinking perhaps he might aid us by looking up this man Alvarez. He has rendered us valuable assistance, as far as it has been in his power to do so. From him we have learned of the death of Alvarez; also of the fact of Hugh Daggett having been in Santa Fé about the latter part of July or the first of August of the year 1860, and later; that he drew money from the bank here — and there the matter rests. Mr. Arthur Daggett is the only remaining son now of the three. The share which would have gone to Trevylyn would fall to Mordaunt, and he is willing to expend large sums if a knowledge of the whereabouts of his uncle Hugh can be furnished, or conclusive and satisfactory proofs of his death established. So you see how the matter stands."

Bill does not make any reply; he is thinking, studying whys and wherefores; at last he says, "You say Arthur Daggett has a daughter?"

"Yes; Millicent."

"In case of the death of her father, she would come in for her father's share of the property?"

"Certainly, there is no other children, and her mother is dead."

"And, if conclusive proofs of the death of Hugh Daggett are furnished, evidence that he died without an heir, what would become of *his* share?"

"It would be equally divided between Arthur and young Mordaunt."

"So" — thinking a moment — "does the young man know this?"

"Of course; he is no longer a boy; he must be nearly five and twenty."

"Honorable young fellow? Church member, and so on? or mercenary?"

" Really, I can't say; I have always thought him moral enough—honorable, I should think."

" Does he seem to care for his cousin? That is, would you imagine, from what you have seen, that he would like to double up with her?'

" Double up! I don't understand you, sir."

" Oh; marry her?"

" I believe there is a feeling of tenderness between the young people, but that would not be strange; they have been raised together from childhood."

" Yes, that's so. It would be a pretty good thing for this young fellow to marry his cousin, for, if it was found that Hugh Daggett was dead, and had left no children, all this big money would fall to him at the death of his uncle."

" Yes; that is true."

" He could well afford to pay well for positive information; perhaps would pay more for proofs of the death of his uncle Hugh, rather than information of him living. Don't you think so?"

" No; I believe that both Arthur and Mordaunt Daggett would feel pleased to find the long-lost relative."

" Maybe; I won't contradict you; but I'll tell you what has been my experience through life. Take any poor man, and he may be a decent sort of fellow, willing to help a comrade, glad to be of service. But give that same man a chance to get ahead, to get big money, and he'll walk over his chums, and trample them down, to get the dust.

Gold hardens a man's heart. I guess that is pretty generally admitted."

"In the majority, yes; but there are exceptions."

"Oh, yes; I am only speaking of the most of people."

"And I guess you're right," affirmed Bartholomew.

"Well, what do you think of the case?" and the English lawyer speaks somewhat curtly. He dislikes superfluous conversation.

"Yes, to business," cries Bill.

"Well, I think it a pretty tight one; I happen to know nearly every man in this section, and I don't know of any by the name of Daggett. I *did* know Pietro Alvarez. He was a pretty tough customer, stage robber, bandit, general all-round cut-throat. I have been connecting these things a little in my mind. Hugh Daggett drew five thousand dollars from the bank, here in Santa Fé, in 1860. Pietro writes that he can furnish information of the missing man. Pietro is a desperate scoundrel, a thief. The five thousand and Alvarez might have been mixed up in some way. Perhaps Pietro relieved the man of the five thousand, and put him out of the way."

"That might have been," mused the Englishman. "But would he have been willing to run the risk of arrest and punishment, in order to gain the reward offered."

"Hardly, but he might have had some scheme to work it. Mind, I do not say that Daggett was killed, he may be alive even now, living under an assumed name, and Alvarez may have in some way discovered this; but, as he is dead, we cannot look for any information from that source."

"Will you take the case?"

A look of mild surprise on the handsome face of the detective.

"Why, of course I will. I have had less than this to work on several times, and have come out ahead. I'll take your case. I have laid my plans already, that is, some of them; and you can bet that, if Hugh Daggett lives, I'll find him. If he is dead, I'll know it. You can depend on me. Give me time, and I'll get there."

He speaks enthusiastically; his dark face aglow, his wonderful eyes flashing.

"What did I tell you!" exclaimed Bartholomew. "I told you he was the man."

Bassett, however, remains calm; he looks doubtful.

"I hope you may be successful," he says. "If you are, you will be liberally rewarded. I shall remain here for some time, probably not in Santa Fé, but a letter addressed me here will always reach me. I may take a trip to San Francisco. I shall visit your famous hot springs, at Las Vegas, at any rate. Let me hear from you as you proceed; and, if you need the sinews of war, money, do not hesitate to let me know."

"Good. I will begin at once. Good-day, gentlemen; you will hear from me." And, with a graceful bow, he is gone.

"A man who means to succeed," comments

Bartholomew, as the door closes behind the detective.

"Evidently," answers Bassett.

CHAPTER III.

AN ATTACK BY BANDITS.

SUNSET on the prairie.

The gorgeous tints in the western sky, pink, now fiery red, softly intermingling with the delicate tints of green, purple, and amethyst, are worthy of the pencil of earth's greatest artist. A sunset which, if painted in the glowing colors of nature's artist, would insure fame and fortune to him who could transfer the beautiful scene, as it is, to canvas.

Old Sol has been unusually oppressive this day, blazing down upon mother earth with fierce intensity since early morning, shining upon the wide prairie, upon the little cavalcade which has been struggling along through the almost unbearable heat since daybreak.

A little party of seven.

Seven horses, or, rather, the tough broncho, which alone seems capable of existing in this climate. Three white-covered wagons, which bring up the rear, and a homely-looking but serviceable burro, or Mexican donkey, which bears upon his back some of the baggage of the party.

They are riding along at an easy pace. They are obliged to do so, or leave the wagon behind, and besides, the day has been too warm for violent exercise. At the head of the little cavalcade is one of these characters so much read of, so much written about in the old frontier days; an old, grizzled, long-haired scout, clad in buckskin from head to foot, with the ever-ready brace of six-shooters strapped around his waist, the repeating Winchester rifle slung across his broad shoulders. The weather-beaten face is tanned from many years' exposure to sun, wind and storm; but the keen eyes are as bright as ever, and scan the horizon with quick, watchful gaze, which insures safety from sudden attacks. For, although the redskins of the olden time are not so troublesome now as then; still, they are near the Mexican border, and there are fierce, bloodthirsty men who hesitate not one instant to shed human blood if there is prospect of making a harvest of gold — bandits, infinitely worse, more to be feared, than the most cruel savages.

Old Buckskin Ben knows this, and, although he has not said one word to the little party of tourists, whom he is guiding; still, he keeps a sharp lookout. There is yet a distance of five miles to cover before they will reach the timber "motté" where they are to encamp for the night, and it will be nearly dark before the spot is reached.

A short distance behind the scout, finely mounted, ride three persons whose dress indicates the tourist — two men, one well along in years; the other, apparently of five and twenty, of medium stature, dark, handsome, carefully dressed in a well-fitting riding costume; and a beautiful girl — a girl such as poets delight to write of, as mankind rave about; fair as a lily, with flowing golden hair, which, unconfined beneath her broad hat, falls in rippling beauty to the symmetrical waist. One tiny hand, incased in a buckskin riding gauntlet, lightly holds the rein that guides her pony; the other, ungloved, sparkling with many costly rings, shades the large, beautiful eyes, as she observes, with open-mouthed surprise, the magnificent sunset.

The two men are riding a little apart from their companion, and are discussing some important subject in monotone.

The balance of these riders are servants of these three; a stolid-looking, fat-faced fellow, a neat, dapper young man, and a lady.

The wagons are propelled by the means of mules, driven by rough teamsters, and are fitted up as sleeping apartments for the travelers; the baggage and cooking utensils being carried underneath.

"I sometimes doubt the wisdom of this step," remarks the elderly gentleman to the other, as they go along.

"It would have been better to have allowed Bassett to have investigated the matter, rather than undertake it ourselves. True, the trip has been a pleasant one so far, but it seems to me that it is unnecessary."

The young man made a gesture of impatience.

"I have explained to you several times, Uncle Arthur, that Bassett *could not* have attended to it. He was already on his way to the States when the letter came which brought the information. You saw by the tone of it that the writer would deal only with principles, and it is a matter of vital importance to us that this mystery should be cleared up. Just think of it! nearly one million pounds sterling stowed away in the vaults of a bank, when it should be ours. It is the only thing that could be done, and we have not many days to wait before we shall know all."

"Perhaps you are right; but what would be the harm of communicating with Mr. Bassett?"

"We can do so when we have had the interview with the party; a letter would not reach him in time now, we were not sure of his address when we arrived in New York."

"That is so. Well, I hope it will all be made plain to us, now that we have come so far, and taken such trouble."

"I feel sure that it will. See! the letter speaks plainly."

And the young man takes a soiled and worn envelope from his pocket. Removing a sheet of note-paper therefrom, he read:

"I have read your advertisement offering £10,000 reward for information regarding one Hugh Daggett, who left England in the year of 1859 or 1860, coming to the United States and emigrating to New Mexico. I can give you the information desired, for I knew Hugh Daggett, and know what became of him. I also know why he left his home, and several other things which may be of interest to you. If you are willing to trust me, I am willing to accept the reward, *but I must deal only with principals*, as I do not care to transact business of this kind through agents. In fact, it would not be admissible, for my own personal safety, to do so. If you are as anxious to learn of these things as your numerous advertisements would lead me to believe, I think you had better come to this country, where we can have a meeting, and all will be made known to you. Bring the money in gold.

"INIGO BALBASO."

"So you can see by this, that this man Balbaso, knows that, which, if told us, will enrich us, and end this mystery. The letter we received in New York appoints the place of meeting, and our scout informs us that to-morrow night at sunset we will have reached the spot."

"Yes; and he also states that the locality is a dangerous one; that it is not far from the rendezvous of the most dreaded desperado in this section — Juan Valdoso."

The old man speaks nervously. The younger one laughs.

"Bah! You have nothing to fear. We are well armed, and no one can surprise us upon these open prairies."

"Not during the day, perhaps, but at night."

"You give yourself needless alarm, uncle Arthur. The peculiar character who has rendered us such valuable service as guide, is, like the rest of his fellows, entirely too suspicious. A man who continually goes armed is at heart a timorous coward, and greatly magnifies the danger. Besides, our buckskin-clad friend is old and garrulous; he dearly loves the sound of his own voice."

"Ah, papa! Isn't that sunset beautiful." It is the voice of the girl.

The father turns with a suppressed sigh; he feels nervous, somehow, and the words of his nephew do not reassure him.

"Yes, Millicent; the works of God are ever beautiful."

The young man approaches the side of the girl.

"And how is my little cousin standing the long ride?" he asks.

The maiden does not answer him. She either is so absorbed in her contemplation of the scene of grandeur before her as not to have heard him, or she purposely avoids answering him.

"Not fatigued, I hope," he essays once more.

This time she answers him, without looking at him; answers rather coldly.

"Not very. I enjoy riding."

"It has been our favorite pastime at home," he says.

"Yes."

Little more is said. The girl evidently does not wish to converse with the young fellow, or she is too deeply interested in something else.

The young man, Mordaunt Daggett, notices the coolness of speech and action. It is not the first time. It has been so for some time. But he takes it all. He is playing for high stakes, and does not permit such a thing as a woman's coldness to aggravate him. Presently the father rides up to the scout, and engages him in conversation, and Mordaunt takes advantage of it. He rides up to the side of the beauty.

"You are very distant of late," he begins, reproachfully.

"Would you expect me to be otherwise?" she answers, with haughty surprise.

"It grieves me to the heart, Millicent. You are really hard on me."

She turns on him contemptuously.

"Heart! You have no heart. I once loved you, Mordaunt, looked up to you as a Hindoo worshiper looks up to its god; thought you everything that was noble, the soul of truth and honor; but the night that poor, weak creature came to me and told me the story of your baseness, told me how you had deceived her, leading her on to her ruin, and had then cast her aside like an old glove, I turned against you; my eyes were opened. I know you in your true character. I have forced myself to be civil to you, so that papa would not notice anything. I kept my knowledge from him; but you can never be anything to me again. Do not attempt to make it so."

The dark face of the cousin flushes; the deceitful eyes assume a look which, if seen by the girl, would startle her; but he only says:

"You accepted her statement without giving me a chance for explanation. You took it for granted that she must have spoken the truth."

"I *know* she did. The very servants know it. Why, even Pierre, your valet, not twenty feet from where you are now, knows the circumstances. No; it is useless to try and deny it. It is true."

"Very well, then. I suppose I must abide by your superior judgment," he answers, and rides to the rear of the train.

In thirty minutes they are encamped. The fires are lighted, the burro unloaded (much to his evident relief), and brisk preparations are being made for the primitive evening meal.

Millicent is in her wagon, which she shares with her maid. That individual is combing out her long, beautiful hair, and talking as she does so.

"I am really beginning to feel like a gypsy miss," she says; "cooking in the open air; sleeping in a wagon. I feel as if I could even tell fortunes. Isn't it a funny way to live?"

"Rather enjoyable, Sarah," replies her young mistress. "There! do my hair up tightly. I am getting hungry, and I can see that supper is nearly prepared."

She is looking out the front end of the wagon. She sees the crackling fire, the preparations going on for the meal. But what is that sound, gradually growing more apparent? The sound of horses' feet upon the prairie, a succession of dull thuds, that are evidently heard by the balance of the party. Yes, now, old Ben raises his grizzled head. He has also heard. He seizes his rifle and hurries to the edge of the "motté."

A sharp crack of a rifle. A cry of anguish.

Then a dozen gaudily appareled, fierce-looking men gallop in upon the scene.

"Throw up your hands!" comes the stern command, and she sees that the men of the party are covered with the rifles of the newcomers.

She gives a piercing scream as she sees her father in the grasp of a bearded man who demands the valuables of the party — a scream that attracts the attention of two of the band, and brings them to the wagon. They dismount from their ponies; they clamber into the wagon; they seize her in their powerful arms. She knows she is being lifted out of the wagon; she is about to swoon, when a series of lusty, wild cheers ring out on the night; a score of shots, and one of her captors falls with a groan upon the ground; the other turns and flees. She feels a strong arm catch her as she is about to fall, and a musical voice murmur:

"You are all right, now, miss; we have scattered them."

She looks up, and catches the look of respectful admiration in the dark eyes of the man who has rescued her — looks up, and gasps, almost unconsciously.

"You — you — what brought you — who are you?"

"Mexican Bill! at your service, miss. Your camp has been attacked by Mexican bandits, but myself and comrades came in time to save you," and he bows gracefully.

Then overtaxed nature gives way, and, when the danger is past, she faints.

A true woman!

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS INTERVIEW.

By this time the badly frightened maid comes to her mistress, and the handsome cow-boy, with one last look at the pale, beautiful face, leaves her to the care of the servant.

His comrades have ridden in pursuit of the depredators, but have failed to capture any. These fierce desperadoes are well mounted. They are just returning to the little camp as Bill approaches the elderly gentleman, who is lying exhausted from fear and the sudden and unexpected attack.

" All got away, cap'en," says one of the party, who have come just in time, a wild-looking cow-boy, clad in flannel shirt and chaparrals.

" Excepting those on the ground yonder," replies the " cap'en," pointing grimly to the dead bodies of three of the bandits, who have been killed at the first fire.

" Are any of the boys hurt?" he asks, quickly.

" Dick, a little; flesh wound in the leg. The scout in charge of this outfit is hurt some, too?"

" Attend to Dick. Let some of the boys move this carrion; the sight is not a pleasant one for ladies; and, by the way, who is the scout?"

" Old Buckskin Ben."

" What! old Benny? Where is he?"

" Over there, by the fire."

Without further comment or parley, the leader of this brave band hurries to the little knot of people gathered about the fire. He sees the teamsters tenderly binding up a nasty wound in the shoulder of the aged scout; and also observes that the old gentleman, evidently the man of greatest importance here, is reviving. He does not stop to speak to him, but approaches old Ben.

"A nasty wound, Benny," he says.

"Kinder; but old Ben'll pull through. Why! Blast me, if it aren't Bill. What in the devil brings you hyar, Bill?" The old scout recognizes the handsome cowboy.

"Oh, passing by; on business, you know. What outfit is this?" indicating the party around the fire.

"Keerful, pards," and a spasm of pain convulses the old man's features, as one of the teamsters is a little rough. Recovering, he answers: "Party of Englishmen out hyar on some tomfool errand."

"Name?"

"Doggitt, or somethin' like it."

"Doggitt." The detective turns it over in his mind. The name has a familiar sound. "Daggett," he says, presently.

"Yas, that's it. Blast yer eyes, Mike! Yer aren't pulling on a tough mule's jaw. Be keerful!"

The cowboy detective turns from him; he is filled with astonishment to hear that name here, on the prairie; the name that has been in his mind's eye since the meeting with the lawyers.

"Wonder who they are?" he mutters. "English, too, so Benny says."

He approaches the fire. The servant who, by this time, has effectually revived his master, rises to his feet, as the detective draws near.

"A close call, sir!" remarks the cowboy, bowing to Arthur Daggett, carelessly.

"Very, sir. Are you the leader of those brave fellows who have rendered us such timely aid."

"I have that honor," responded Bill, removing his sombrero.

"Allow me to thank you, sir. If you had not come just when you did, God knows what those devils would have done. Murdered us all, perhaps." And the old man grasps the two hands of the detective in his own, and shakes them heartily.

"I hardly think so, uncle," remarks a young man, who has been standing a little in the rear. 'They only demanded our valuables, and would have probably gone, leaving us unmolested, when they had obtained what they wanted."

The detective shoots a quick glance at the young man. He has noticed a slight sneer in the words just spoken.

"You are not acquainted with the maxim of Juan Valdoso's band?" he says, quietly.

"I must confess my ignorance," replies the young man, coldly.

"It is this: '*Dead men tell no tales.*' Significant, eh?"

"Very. Was it Juan Valdoso who attacked us?"

"The same. I know him well."

"So? An intimate acquaintance, eh?" very sarcastically.

The handsome detective flushes angrily.

"Not an intimate acquaintance, sir. Say rather, an intimate *enemy*. I have been brought into association with him in an official capacity several times."

"An official capacity?" the old gentleman speaks. "I don't quite understand you."

"Pardon me for not introducing myself. I am a detective, known throughout this section as Mexican Bill. As Valdoso is a daring criminal, it is but natural that I should know him."

The young man glances quickly at the detective as he speaks these words; a glance that betokens fear — startled surprise. The cowboy notices it, and secretly wonders. Why should this stranger, an Englishman, show signs of fear at hearing his name? He surely could not have heard it before.

The elderly man draws a breath of relief.

"I feel secure, now that you are with us," he says. "I sincerely hope you can arrange it to remain with us until our business in this wild country is completed. We would be willing to amply compensate you; would we not, Mordaunt?" to the young man.

Mordaunt! Ah! the shrewd detective remembers the name, and again wonders why this party has come to America — what is their business there.

"But we have not introduced ourselves," adds the old gentleman.

"Uncle!" cries the young man, sharply, warningly, "consider what you are doing."

The elderly man looks at him with surprise.

"I do not understand you," he answers.

"It is hardly a wise policy to tell any one our names, or the nature of the business that brings us here."

The elder flushes.

"I cannot see the necessity of so much secrecy. The young man has rendered us a valuable service; he may be able to assist us; at any rate, it will not affect the object in view to return his politeness with the knowledge of the names of those he has assisted."

The detective has been watching the young man closely; he does not feel favorably impressed with his appearance. He now speaks quickly.

"It is not necessary to tell me your names; I know them already." He sees his words have created surprise; so he continues; he is about to make a bold stroke.

"You, sir, are Mr. Arthur Daggett, and you," to the astonished junior, "are Mordaunt Daggett, son of Trevylyn Daggett. You have with you your daughter Millicent, and servants," to the elder man again.

To say that the information in the possession of the detective created surprise would but feebly express the proper feeling which surged through the minds of these two. The detective observes it, and follows it up.

"Your business here is also known to me. You are in search of Hugh Daggett, who disappeared in the year of 1859."

With a cry of angry amazement, Mordaunt springs forward, and faces the handsome detective.

"How in the fiend's name did you know that?" he demanded.

The detective congratulates himself. He has struck the mark. He has hit the nail on the head.

"Oh, I am a detective," he answers, coolly. "It is my business to keep posted on all subjects. Perhaps I possess supernatural powers," quietly, but with a slight tinge of sarcasm.

The young man Mordaunt turns away. He is filled with amazement at this fellow's information. From what source could he have obtained it? He walks toward the edge of the timber. He is angry; very much put out. Can it be from the detective's words? Hardly. It is something more than that.

Arthur Daggett and Mexican Bill are left alone. The old gentleman is also perplexed. He is surprised at the knowledge possessed by the quiet, handsome man before him. Finally he speaks.

"You must, indeed, be possessed of supernatural powers, sir, for we have not divulged to any one the object we had in coming here. To our guide only have we stated the point we wished to reach, and this morning he informed us that to-morrow night we would arrive at our destination."

While the old man has been speaking, the active brain of the detective has been busy. He has been thinking; putting this and that together; considering whys and wherefores. Now he says:

" There is nothing very surprising in the matter when you understand it; and, if you will give me your word that you will not mention it to any one — not even to your nephew — I will tell you how I came to know you and the nature of your business."

He is searching deeply. He cannot understand why Bassett has been sent to attend to this business, and has been followed so soon by the parties themselves.

" You have my word, sir, as a gentleman, I will not betray your confidence."

Arthur Daggett speaks earnestly. The detective seems satisfied, for he says: " In the first place, I learned the story of Hugh Daggett's disappearance from your lawyer, Isaac Bassett, who also engaged me to investigate the matter. *Your* name, that is your family name, I got from Buckskin Ben. I heard you call your nephew Mordaunt. I had the pleasure of rescuing your daughter from the dirty scoundrels who were about to carry her off, and so, by putting one thing with another, by springing it on you suddenly, I got at the truth — very simple, now that you understand it."

The old gentleman seizes his hand: " You are a smart one," he cries.

" A detective must necessarily think a little," answers the young man, modestly.

"Now, sir, that I have told you all, will you be kind enough to enlighten me a little?"

"If I can."

"It will not be difficult for you to do so. It is only to answer a few questions."

"I will do so."

"Why did you come to America? Your presence here is not known to your lawyer."

"I doubt if Mordaunt would like my answering that question."

"Think of yourself; think of your lovely daughter. Do not allow the fact of any other person's likes or dislikes to interfere with your own happiness and success."

The detective speaks warmly.

"But what has my answering your question against my nephew's wishes to do with my happiness or success?"

Surprise is plainly delineated on the old man's countenance.

"Mr. Daggett, I am a detective."

"Yes."

"Detectives sometimes get peculiar fancies — strange ideas. I am no exception to the rule. I believe your presence here to be a peculiar circumstance. I feel that I, as a detective employed in your interests, should know why you came. Will you tell me?"

"Why, yes. I don't suppose it will affect our plans in any way. In fact, you may help us, as I said before Mordaunt left us."

"Well, then, proceed."

" As you know the story since the disappearance of my brother Hugh, the death of my father, and his peculiar will, it is not necessary to go over that. My nephew, Mordaunt, has been unceasing in his efforts since the day I got the first real tangible clue. He has given it his personal attention, and I have left it almost entirely to his discretion. The very day after Bassett had left us, we received a letter from this country, signed by one Inigo Baldaso, and claiming that he could furnish the information we so earnestly desired, but stipulating that he would deal only with principals. Mordaunt seemed eager to start at once to America, and finally I yielded to his persuasions, and, thinking it would be a nice trip for my daughter, I brought her with me. In New York we received another letter from this Balbaso, appointing a meeting. We had written him immediately upon the receipt of the first letter. We came as far by rail as we could, and, as the rendezvous is many miles from any railroad, we have been obliged to continue our journey in the primitive style. That is the story, sir."

For some few moments the detective remained silent and thoughtful, then he asks: " You did not inform Bassett of your intentions?"

" No."

" Why did you neglect this?"

" We were not positive as to his route."

" Still, a telegram sent ahead to some point where you knew he would be, would have reached him."

"Mordaunt seemed to think it unnecessary."

"You trust greatly to your nephew's judgment."

"Well, he is young and shrewd. I, myself, have spoken about informing Bassett; but he showed me that it was unnecessary at first, impracticable later on, and I gave in to him."

"Thank you, Mr. Daggett. That is all I wish to know. I would advise you to retire, sir. You must be weary, and, really, I must ask your pardon for subjecting you to this sweating process."

"Is the information of service to you?"

"I think it will be. Good night, you can rest easy. Myself and boys will remain with you for the time," and, turning on his heel, the detective saunters away.

"So, he trusts it all to Mordaunt," he mutters; "and Mordaunt has his eyes open for the main chances, or I am greatly mistaken."

He walks slowly, aimlessly along, unconsciously going in the same direction as that taken by the man who occupied his thoughts. He is thinking of the strange idea which has occurred to him while listening to the lawyer Bassett's story. If Hugh Daggett was proven dead, and the lovely daughter of Arthur married to Mordaunt, this young fellow would be the possessor of all the vast wealth. True, the daughter Millicent would not be entitled to her share until the death of the father, but he might die suddenly.

"By G–d; very suddenly," he cries, half aloud.

He believes this man Mordaunt to be a cool, calculating scoundrel. The thought has just occurred to him that he would not hesitate to put the old man out of the way if necessary. He stops and thinks.

Suddenly his practiced ear detects the sound of footsteps. Not behind him, but before him

He creeps silently but swiftly along, and soon comes in sight of the individual who is ahead of him.

It is not a very bright night, and the timber is close, but he recognizes the man Mordaunt.

Wondering what he is doing alone among the trees, the detective creeps along after him; sees another form emerge from the forest, and, with a start of surprise, recognizes it also.

" Valdoso! " he mutters.

The two meet, and enter into conversation.

With stealth the detective draws sufficiently near enough to hear what they are saying, and with bated breath and attentive ear takes it all in.

CHAPTER V.

VALUABLE INFORMATION.

"A FINE fizzle you make of it," he heard Mordaunt say.

" It did not enter into our contract that Mexican Bill and his cowboys were to show up at such a time."

" You should have fired upon them."

" Bah! You don't know what you are talking about. You don't stop to consider that they outnumbered us."

Mordaunt muttered a curse beneath his breath.

"The understanding was, that you were to surprise the camp, shoot down the parties referred to, capture the girl and myself, and make off with the gold."

"Yes, that was the understanding."

"Instead of that, you ride in and cover every one with your rifles, and demand the valuables, firing only one shot at the servant, and failing to kill him at that. Why didn't you shoot as directed?"

"For the very good reason, young sir, that you were standing immediately in front of the man you wanted out of the way, and we could not reach him without killing you."

"A fine excuse. Why, I saw you have him by the throat myself. Why didn't you finish him then?"

"The cowboys came on us at that moment. Two of my men had the girl, and would have had her on a pony in another minute, but Mexican Bill himself shot one of them down, and rescued her. I tell you, we would all have been killed or captured if we had not gone when we did."

Valdoso speaks sullenly. He does not like to be brought to account by this young man.

"Well, I suppose it is all over for a while. We cannot do anything at present," says Mordaunt.

"Not while Mexican Bill is in camp. Get rid of him, and I have the scheme, a better one than the last two."

" This long-haired Bill will leave us in the morning."

" Don't be too sure of that. Not of his own free will. But I think I can arrange it so he will."

" You can; how?" the young man speaks eagerly.

" Go slow; we must make other arrangements first."

" Arrangements! What other arrangements?"

" I must be better paid."

The young man mutters a curse.

" Why, you greedy, thieving bandit, you were to receive the ten thousand in the wagon, and forty thousand more if successful. Is not that enough?"

The Mexican lays his hand on the arm of the other heavily.

" Go slow," he hisses. " Be easy with these hard names. I am not any worse than you. I rob and murder for money; but I do it openly. Every one knowns that I do it, and keep out of my way if they can. You plot for high stakes, and would rob and murder in the dark—yes, would have your kind relative, your good old uncle, murdered without the slightest hesitation. I am a murderer, and all that, but you are a sneaking snake in the grass."

The detective, hearing the words of the Mexican, starts in his hiding-place. So his estimation of the young villain's character has been about right.

He observes that Mordaunt throws off the hand. He hears him say, conciliatorily:

" I spoke hastily. We must not quarrel. What other arrangements do you want to make."

" That's better," answers the bandit.

"Now, I think, we can do business, and no more mistakes. First, before I tell you my scheme, I must inform you that I have come to the conclusion that I agreed to do my part of the business too cheap. I have been investigating the matter, and I find there is about a million pounds, or five million dollars in it. I did not know that when I first wrote to you answering your private advertisement."

"Private advertisement!" flashes through the detective's mind. "So, young Mordaunt has been working a little on the quiet," and he listens attentively.

"Well, go on," and Bill can see that Mordaunt is growing impatient.

The bandit continues:

"I did not even know it when I sent the first letter to your uncle, as you instructed me; but I know it all now, and have come to the conclusion, that, as I can put you in the way to get it, that I should be at least entitled to one-fifth of it."

"One-fifth! two hundred thousand pounds! one million dollars!" and Mordaunt grasps a small tree for support.

"Yes, why not? I can keep you out of all of it by simply holding back what I know. Why should I not be entitled to one-fifth of it by putting you in the way of getting it?"

"It is astonishing — your greed — your proposition."

"You are the greedy one. Why, I put the uncle out of the way. You get the lovely girl.

You get your share and Hugh Daggett's too. You can afford to give me what I ask. Just think, with all that money, I would not be forced to rob and kill. I could become an honest man," sneeringly.

"I will think of it."

"No. You must agree to my terms to-night, now or never. If you are not willing to be generous no—not that; it is but my just due I ask—if you will not do the right thing by me, I shake you off, and will have nothing more to do with *you*," putting a peculiar emphasis on the last word.

Both Mordaunt and the listening detective observe the emphasis. Mordaunt speaks.

"What do you mean by having nothing more to do with *me?* Is there any one else you know of, that your information will benefit?"

"Perhaps."

"I don't understand you. Come, speak out."

"Do I get my share?"

"I told you I would think of it."

"Well, think quick."

The plotting young villain takes off his hat and pushes back his hair from his forehead. Suddenly he cries:

"No. I will not accede to your demand. I will give you what I agreed to—not another penny."

The bandit king smiles.

"Fool! I can see through your bluff. You think you have struck upon a plan which will make me tell what I really know. You think you will put men on my track who will bring me into court, and force from me what you wish to know. Fool! I say again. I can read you. You would only fail. But, as you said but a short time since, we must not quarrel. I was only bluffing you a little when I said I would have nothing more to do with *you*. I don't want to spoil your game. I don't want to block my own. You have been advertising for proofs of Hugh Daggett's death. I can furnish them. I told you of that in our former meeting. It was there that we arranged the little plan to get rid of the old man and put the girl in your power. That little surprise party fell through. I know you have a little idea in your head that, in some way, you might use the knowledge of Daggett's death to your advantage, even without my assistance; but, as I want the money, and am willing to help you, I will tell you one thing more ——"

"Go on," murmurs the crestfallen villain.

"Even if you were to prove Hugh Daggett's death (and you might do so, for there are others who know it), you would get only your share; even if you put the old man out of the way, married the daughter and got his share, I would block your game; you could not get it all."

"Why not, if Hugh Daggett's death were proven?"

"*Hugh Daggett had a son.*"

Very quietly the words were spoken, but they startled both the seen and unseen listener.

"You did not tell me of this before!" cries Mordaunt.

"I was keeping it in reserve for an occasion like this."

Mordaunt recovers himself, and goes closely to the bandit; so close that his eyes pierce those of the smiling robber.

"I believe you lie!" he says, after a moment's scrutiny.

"Again I say, go slow, young man; it is not safe to give a man the lie in this country. I might kill you, and benefit myself by so doing, if you are not civil." Spoken calmly, but every word of it meant.

Mordaunt draws back. "You say there was a son?" he mutters.

"Yes. I will be more explicit. I will say, *There is a son!* for Hugh Daggett's child, born on the same night when both father and mother died, still lives, and is a member of my band. So you see, Mr. Mordaunt Daggett, that I have the power to block your game, and could do it. Now, one thing more: what is to prevent me from putting both you and your uncle out of the way, producing the only remaining heir (and I have positive proofs of his identity), and sharing this money with him? I told you a few moments ago that your death would benefit me. Can't you see that I have spoken truly?" and he bends forward and looks into his companion's face. The younger villain recoils.

"But you would not do that?" he gasps.

The bandit smiles.

"I *could* do it," he says. "It all depends upon you. Do I get my share? Shall this son, ignorant of his parentage, remain so? Will you allow me to help you? or must I go it alone? Come. I have shown you my hand. You should know how to play."

"I will accede to your demands," mutters Mordaunt, sullenly.

"I thought you would. Here, read this," producing a paper from the inside pocket of his velvet jacket. "You will find it only an agreement to pay me one million dollars in case I produce the proofs that Hugh Daggett is dead and left no children. It is all right. I intended springing it on you after our little surprise party of to-night. I have an indelible pencil. That stands good in law. So sign it, and then I'll unfold my second scheme, which is bound to be successful."

With a quick, eager movement, Mordaunt takes the paper, reads it and signs it.

"Good," murmurs the bandit, placing it carefully in his pocket. "Now for the scheme." And, lowering his voice, he began unfolding his plan to the other.

In vain the detective strained his ears to catch it. The bandit was speaking in a low whisper, and, to the chagrin of the cowboy officer, he began to walk away from the clerk, accompanied by Mordaunt, talking in as low tone as he could.

"Confound it!" mutters the detective, rising to his feet, glad, at least, to be free from the uncomfortable position he has been obliged to assume for so long. "Confound it! But I will watch young

Mordaunt. I will find out their scheme. By Jupiter, what a scoundrel that fellow is. But he has met his match in Valdoso. So there is a son. I have gained much valuable information this night, and I'll act on it too. I must watch both Daggett and the Mexican. And, above everything else, I must keep my eyes open for signs of danger to that old man and his beautiful daughter. By Jupiter! she is a beauty."

He walks slowly back to camp. He finds only his own men in sight. They are playing cards by the light of the fire. The people of the outfit have gone to rest.

He stops and watches them play.

In a short time Mordaunt hurries into camp.

Bill sees him, and cries:

"Taking a walk?"

"Yes; seeing that there is no prowlers near, before I slept." And he leaves the fire, and clambers into the wagon, where he sleeps.

The detective looks after him, and mutters:

"And, I suppose, he will sleep soundly. Oh, what a villain; and such a liar. Well, I like a good liar."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSING GIRL.

DAY breaks early in midsummer, and so it is quite light when, at six o'clock, Mexican Bill yawns, stretches out his long, shapely legs, and rises from the blanket where he had slept. He does not need a soft bed of down, this man. With his saddle for a pillow, a blanket stretched upon the ground, another to cover him, he sleeps as soundly as though upon the softest couch of the wealthiest king upon earth, the sleep of an easy conscience, the sleep of the just.

He has been awakened by the noise of active life surrounding him; and, looking about him, sees his brave companions, some engaged in rubbing down their hardy bronchos; some mounted, riding out on the prairie, lariat in hand, lassooing the half-wild ponies which have been turned loose to graze the night before. Buckskin Ben is walking about the little camp, giving orders to the teamsters under his command; seeing that the mules are properly cared for before harnessing them up to the wagons, to proceed upon their journey. One of the party is preparing breakfast, and the odor of the boiling coffee greets the detective's olfactory organ agreeably, for he is hungry.

Neither of the Daggetts is to be seen; they have probably not risen yet; so Bill, stretching himself, walks to the fire, and is soon devouring huge slices of bacon and bread, washed down with coffee; this finished, he feels like a new man. It is astonishing what an effect a balmy morning, a good meal, and a cup of coffee will produce upon a man; it braces him up, refreshes him; even in trouble, it relieves the anxious mind for the time; the satisfaction of feeling the hot blood coursing

Lassoing the half-wild ponies.

MEXICAN BILL—Page 64.

through the strong, healthy body, the satisfaction of living, is gratifying.

He has just finished his meal, when he hears footsteps behind him. He turns, and sees Arthur Daggett.

"Fine morning!" remarks the old gentleman.

"One of the attractions of our country," answers Bill.

"Just eating your breakfast, I see. Ah, my young people should be up, enjoying the beautiful morning, taking in the fresh air. But, you know, Mr. Bill, young people of the present time spend much more time in bed than we used to when I was a boy. They spend too much of life in bed."

The detective agrees with him, and the old gentleman delivers his opinion of the advantages of early rising, fresh air, etc. Rather a lengthy dissertation, but the detective does not interrupt him. He hears him through, his mind far away at the same time, thinking of the interview he has overheard the previous night, reflecting upon the business of Mordaunt Daggett; wondering why it is, that such a desperate scoundrel is connected with such a noble family.

His heart is longing to gaze upon the face of beautiful Millicent Daggett. He recalls the look upon her countenance when he had rescued her from the fierce bandit, the look of gratitude in the blue eyes. He is anxious to see her in the clear light of day.

The old gentleman has finished, and, as he does so, the detective observes Mordaunt emerging from his sleeping quarters, carefully dressed, looking bright and refreshed from his slumbers. He approaches his uncle.

"I overslept myself a little," he remarks, without noticing the detective.

"And Millicent is following your example," replies the good old man.

"Why is she not up yet?" and the villain looks surprised.

"No. I shall have to go and arouse her soon. Neither she nor her maid have made their appearance."

The detective looks up at the young man. He has been sitting upon his saddle.

"You look as if you had enjoyed a good night's rest," he observes to Mordaunt.

That gentleman casts a look of contempt upon the cowboy.

"I always sleep soundly," he says, coldly.

"Yes? A contented mind, no doubt," with a slight accent of sarcasm.

"I have no reason to feel discontented," replies young Daggett, forcibly.

"I suppose not. Well"—rising and picking up his saddle preparatory to placing it upon the back of his pony—"I slept well myself."

"A contented mind?" and Mordaunt smiles covertly.

"Not so much so as I should have wished," standing with the saddle in his arms. "But I need strength to combat with those I am pitted against, and I sleep so that I shall gain that which is so essential — a clear brain, a strong arm."

He looks the young man square in the eyes as he speaks, and notices that he turns from his gaze.

He turns and leaves the young villain, and is soon cingling on his saddle.

Arthur Daggett has gone to arouse his sleeping daughter. The detective hears him calling her name in his hearty, cheery voice; sees him shaking the wheel of the wagon to arouse her.

" Millicent! Millicent! come, the birds are singing their loudest and sweetest for you. Come, lazy bones, get up."

No sound. No answer.

Presently he sees the old man stoop, and pick up a short stick from the ground; sees him striking the side of the wagon; hears a faint sound as of some person just awakening from slumber remonstrating in a drowsy tone.

" Ah, that brought her around," cries the old gentleman. Then a scream, a woman's voice, and the maid looks out of the end of the wagon.

" Miss Millicent! " she cries.

" She is not here," her voice sounding broken and alarmed.

" Not there," shouts Arthur Daggett. " Where is she? "

The girl does not know she has been awakened by the sound of the old gentleman's stick beating upon the wagon. She has turned, and found herself alone.

"She has probably risen early, and gone for a walk," murmurs the father.

No; the men have been up since before daybreak; she has not been seen.

The girl seems drowsy yet; she is scarcely herself, despite the confusion that now reigns. The detective runs to the wagon.

"My God, sir," the grief-stricken, anxious father cries, "where can she be? what has become of her."

In his sorrow and anxiety, he clutches the detective's arm. The cowboy reassures him.

"She will be found," he says.

A few sharp orders and the cowboys are scouring the prairie and timber. The detective is soothing the father, watching the face of Mordaunt as he does so. He sees that individual looks pale and anxious.

"Is this part of the scheme?" flashes through the detective's mind.

The cowboys return. One of them has found a small vial out on the prairie, about one hundred yards from the "motté." Mexican Bill takes it, and applies it to his nostrils.

"Chloroform!" he mutters. The truth flashes through his brain. The two women have been anæsthetized, and the girl carried off. The maid is still complaining of a dull headache, through her sobs. Yes; that must be the solution. Who could have done it? Valdoso; no one else.

"I will find your daughter," he says to the old man.

He hurries to his pony. He is about to mount, when Mordaunt approaches him.

"Have you any idea where she is?" he asks.

The cowboy detective springs into his saddle. He looks down upon the other.

"Have you?" he demands.

"Why, no. How should I know?" He speaks in a surprised tone.

"I did not know. I thought perhaps you might have some idea," his eyes piercing the soul of the young man. "I thought perhaps this was part of your scheme."

The words strike home. Despite his attitude of surprise and anxiety, the young man starts.

"What do you mean?" he cries.

"You know. Hear me. I am going to rescue your cousin. I am going to thwart you, young Mordaunt Daggett. As I said yesterday, I may be possessed of supernatural power, for I know where Millicent Daggett has been taken. I know why she was taken there." And, with a piercing glance, he leaves him.

The next moment he is heard giving some orders to his companion. Then he is gone.

Far out on the prairie they see his hardy, swift-footed pony galloping. The stricken father feels that this brave, daring spirit of the plains will bring his darling back to him. He turns to Mordaunt; he murmurs: "He must be positive of her whereabouts; he must know something."

"Very likely," answers that young man; but, as he turns away, a sardonic smile comes to his lips.

He mutters: "Not so much, either, or he would not have gone. Valdoso has a great head." And he lights a cigar.

CHAPTER VII.

"IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES."

AS SWIFT as an arrow from the bow, the little black pony bears its master over the billowy prairie. Startled prairie dogs, sitting upon their haunches outside their burrows, dive down into their earthy homes, coming to the surface again as the thundering hoofs pass by, looking in startled surprise after the receding animal and its untiring rider.

Long-eared jack rabbits scamper away in fright. The sun mounts high in the heavens, and soon asserts its fiery supremacy; but unheeding, without noticing the fierce heat, the swift rider keeps on. On to the caverns where Juan Valdoso hides, where he believes the young English maiden has been taken.

His busy brain is thinking while he rides. He dislikes the idea of leaving old Arthur Daggett alone with his heartless, murderous nephew; but he has given his faithful, fearless companions strict orders. They are not to leave their present camping ground until his return. They are to watch and guard the camp from intruders. He admires the ingenuity of Valdoso in effecting an entrance into the guarded camp. He must have exercised extreme caution to have done so. He feels that he is a foe worthy of giving battle to. He feels a certain amount of pride in the fact that he is to be brought face to face with the cunning Mexican — to pit his strength, his cunning, against his.

So he rides on, stopping only to water his pony at a running stream which crosses his path, to rest him a little. For, as eager as he is to make his destination, he realizes the importance and truth of the saying "That the more haste the less speed," and he knows he must not tire his faithful little animal beyond the power of endurance. It is hardly dark as he reaches the low range of hills in whose fastnesses Valdoso makes his home. He must be camped now, to guard against surprise. He must be the one to come upon the scene unexpected, not the one to be taken unguardedly. So he slackens the pace of his pony, and, to guard further against the sound of approach, he muffles his horse's hoofs with rubber pads, which deaden the sound of his tread

He is passing through a strip of timber. Night has fallen, and the new moon is struggling to break through a mass of clouds which have gathered since sunset. The wind is softly soughing through the trees, and the experienced frontiersman knows that rain is liable to fall before morning. Suddenly, through the trees, he sees the faint glimmer of a fire. Some one is camping in the woods.

"It may be he," he mutters.

He has ridden rapidly all day. Perchance he has overtaken the abductor before he has had a chance to reach the rocky fastnesses of his home.

"So much the better," he thinks; "my work will be so much easier," and, dismounting, he throws the bridle rein over his arm, and creeps through the forest in the direction of the fire. He is within two hundred yards of their encampment, and is beginning to look about him for a safe place to secure his pony, when a startled neigh from that faithful beast causes him to start with a muttered exclamation of anger, and prepare to defend himself, in case the sound has been heard. But no; there is no appearance of surprise in the camp. Probably those so near him have not taken notice of the sound. Perhaps they have thought it emanated from one of their own ponies. So, after making sure of the fact, he ties his pony, and, loosening his revolver in his belt, creeps forward.

He soon is near enough to see the black-visaged scoundrels before him. There are three of them by the fire, One of them is preparing some food; the others are carelessly lolling upon the ground, rolling cigarettes and smoking them. He does not see Valdoso, but feels that he is not far distant.

Ah! as his eyes grow accustomed to the light, he sees two figures, in the shadow. One he recognises as the bandit chief; the other, robed in white, must be the girl, Millicent. He feels as though he would like to rush in upon the band, and rescue the fair girl at once; but he knows this would be an extremely dangerous thing to do, as there are four of them to combat with. No, he must wait, and use stratagem.

An hour passes, and another. The bandits have eaten their meal, and Bill sees that the girl has refused to accept any portion of it, although the chief has endeavored to persuade her. She seems overcome with grief, and the heart of the brave detective feels heavy with sympathy. Patiently he waits, as still as the lofty trees about him. He sees the desperado stretch out by the fire to sleep, Valdoso near the maiden. The time is approaching — the time to act. He can creep around the encampment to the tree where the girl is confined, and, assuring her, in a low tone, of his presence, can release her; and, securing one of the bandits' ponies, place her in the saddle, and make good his escape with the fair one. It all seems easy, and he arises and makes his way to the place where he has left his pony, but a short distance from the spot where he has been crouching. He will have him in readiness for immediate flight. He reaches the spot, but starts in horror and amazement. *His pony is not there!* He is gone.

For the instant, he stands spellbound; then he thinks that, the little animal, being attacked with hunger, has in some way managed to break loose from his fastening, and has wandered away in the woods. Perhaps, in his eagerness and hurry, he has not tied him securely. So, with a muttered expletive, he begins his search for the beast. He searches within a radius of one hundred yards. The moon, which is still struggling to shine, ever and anon, gives him a little light; but the missing pony cannot be found. He is about to return to the camp, trusting to be able to possess himself of one of the bandit's ponies, when he hears a faint sound behind him, a crackling sound as if some one had trodden upon a dry stick, and it had broken under their feet; he turns quickly, with one hand upon his revolver—turns, but too late, for the next moment he is in the clutch of strong arms, arms that bear him to the earth. He struggles desperately; he is an experienced, trained athlete, and very strong, but his efforts are unavailing, and he is soon disarmed and securely bound, his hands behind his back. His captors force him to his feet and he is led toward the camp.

The figures around the fire arise to their feet as he is brought into the firelight. He sees Valdoso come toward him, sees the look of pity and grief in the eyes of the girl.

"Why, it is our great sleuth-hound!" cries the bandit, "our cunning fox. How is it that he is bound and helpless in the power of his enemy? Ha! ha! ho!" and his boisterous laughter sounds out upon the night.

"So you are matched at last, indefatigable one; you have found your equal, shrewd bloodhound; well, we will give you a royal welcome when we shall have reached home; the boys will be glad to see you. You have met Miss Daggett before, I believe, so further introduction is unnecessary. Strange that fate should place you in my power; but fortune plays funny pranks sometimes," and again the loud laughter rings out.

The detective makes no reply; he thinks it best to remain quiet, but he is planning just the same; he is captured, but not conquered.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCHEME DEVELOPS ITSELF.

BEFORE daybreak the bandits are on their way. The girl is placed upon a pony, and led in advance by Valdoso himself; Bill is given his own pony, which he finds has been first captured by the robbers, and secured among those of the band; then they have gone in search of him, and have captured him as shown.

The sun is high in the heavens as they enter the rocky defile that leads to the cave of Valdoso. The chief has said but little to the detective during the ride; merely glancing at him occasionally with a smile of triumph upon his bearded face, which has been returned by a look of defiance by the captive. One of the party has been dispatched an hour in advance; so, when they arrive, the entire band are expecting them.

They greet our hero with cries of savage joy; they are delighted to see him bound and helpless, a prisoner in their midst.

He has been the means of causing many of their number to cross the dividing line between time and eternity. He had been an unrelenting enemy; but now he is in their power. They will see that he does not cause them further trouble.

With despair, the brave detective sees the girl hurried away—and then he is savagely ordered to dismount. He attempts to do so, but, his arms being bound, he finds it a difficult matter to make very rapid progress. Two of the band assist him; they seize him roughly, and drag him from the pony. Biting his lips in anger, the cowboy is obliged to submit. He is in their power; he cannot retaliate.

"Unloosen my hands, and I'll teach you dirty scoundrels a lesson," he mutters to himself.

They are probably aware of this, for they see that his bonds are secure, and then they push him along before them, even kicking him when he does not go fast enough to suit them.

Then his eyes are blindfolded, and in total darkness he is led some distance. He feels the cold, damp air upon his face; he knows he is underground. He feels the brushing of some soft substance against him as he is shoved along, and the next moment the bandage is removed from his eyes, and he is pushed along into what he sees is a small, narrow cave, dimly lighted by an aperture in the roof.

With a parting kick and a curse, his attendants leave him, and he falls upon a pile of skins in the corner, breathing hard, muttering threats of vengeance upon these wretches if ever they are placed in his power again. For a time he remained perfectly still; he is fatigued and sore; his hands and arms pain him from the tightness of his bonds, and he assumes the easiest positions possible to relieve the strain upon them.

Then, after an hour's rest, he struggles to his feet, and begins to explore his surroundings—soon done, for the cave is small—not over eight feet wide by twelve deep; the walls, roof, floor, all of solid rock. A pair of heavy Navajo blankets are hung at one end, the entrance. It must have been these that had brushed against him as he was pushed into the cell. He goes to them, and, with his shoulders, forces his way through them. Only a narrow passage inside, which ends against a block of apparently solid rock. No escape from this place, unless one knows the secrets of the entrance. He knows there must be some direct passage to the air, but, bound as he is, it would be impossible to make use of it, even if found. He begins to feel the cravings of hunger. He has not eaten anything of consequence since leaving the camp of Arthur Daggett the previous morning.

"They cannot intend to starve me," he thinks, as he once more reclines upon the pile of skins.

But his mind is soon set at rest upon that score, for in a short time the blankets are pushed aside, and an old woman enters the cave, bearing a tray of solid silver, beautifully chased and engraved.

"Stolen from some one of wealth," thinks Bill, as he sees it.

The tray is covered with various articles of food and drink, and, as they emit a savory odor, the cravings of hunger grow more intense.

The hag sets it down before him, and prepares to leave the apartment.

"See here," cries the captive; "I can't eat tied up this way. Untie my hands."

The old woman does not appear to understand him.

He speaks in Spanish.

She comprehends the meaning of his words now.

"The master did not give orders to release your hands," she mumbles.

"But how in the devil can I eat?" demands Bill.

"I cannot disobey the master," she mumbles, and leaves him.

The hungry man endeavors to eat by bending over and seizing the smaller morsels in his teeth. He manages to obtain a little in this way, but it is decidedly unsatisfactory. He is in this ungraceful position, when he hears a laugh, and a voice exclaims:

"Eating like the hogs. You present a peculiar appearance, friend Bill."

It is the bandit chief, Valdoso.

The detective reddens with anger.

"Is this part of your idea of revenge," he asks, "to place food within my reach, and deprive me of the power of devouring it?"

The bandit laughs.

"The torture of Tantalus, eh? No. I forgot you were bound, and, of course, none of my slaves would dare to release you without my order. I don't want to tantalize you. I have a nobler feeling of revenge than that. I will release you. I do not fear you; besides, you are unarmed." And, taking his knife from its sheath, he cut the bonds.

With a sigh of relief, the detective stretches out his arms to allow the blood free circulation; and, this done, attacks the food voraciously.

"Thank you for that," he says, with his mouth full. "I can enjoy my meal much better now."

The bandit does not reply. He is watching the handsome fellow before him, a strange look of admiration in his dark, cruel eyes.

The detective enjoys his meal. It is well cooked, and is accompanied with a flask of sweet wine. He finishes, takes a pull at the flask, and then says: "A good meal. Now, if I had a pipe, I would feel in pretty good shape."

The bandit hands him a cigar. "You will find it a good one," he says. "Never was any duty paid on that, and it cost me nothing."

"Perhaps that is an explanation for your generosity," responds the detective, feeling for a match.

The bandit shrugs his shoulders, and furnishes that for which the other is searching.

"No," he answers, quietly. "I can afford to be generous to you. Through you I am likely to become a millionaire."

"Through me — how?" sharply.

"All in good time. I have come to have a talk with you. Enjoy your smoke; I have plenty more where that came from, and you can have all you wish."

The detective smokes, really enjoying the fine Havana, wondering what the man before him has to say. Perhaps only taunts, only to gibe and torment his captive. Still, he has spoken kindly, has acted in a pleasant manner. The bandit finally speaks, sitting upon a rock that juts out into the chamber.

"You are a smart man, Bill," he says.

The detective shrugs his shoulders. "My present position would not lead one to have a very flattering opinion of it," he says.

"Oh, any one is likely to make a mistake at some time. It is not discreditable to you that you are here. I had it arranged to place you in your present position."

"What do you mean?" looking up quickly.

"Simply this. I knew that by carrying off the girl, you would follow her; I knew that you would not hesitate a minute about doing so: so I chloroformed and abducted her, and, expecting you, had everything prepared. It is a part of a scheme."

The detective starts; he speaks quickly.

"Yes; a scheme made with young Mordaunt Daggett?"

He is beginning to see through it all. He begins to see the scheme develop which he had been unable to overhear. He determined to surprise the bandit, and, from the action of the man as he hears his words, knows that he has succeeded in doing so.

"What do you know about Mordaunt Daggett and any scheme?" he cries.

"A great deal—enough to send both of you to the penitentiary."

"Providing, of course, you ever get free," with a quiet sneer.

"Oh, yes; with that proviso."

"What do you know, Bill?" quietly.

"I don't know as I should tell you," answers the detective, blowing a cloud of smoke to the rocky roof. "But I will. I overheard your conversation with that precious scoundrel, and learned all, except your scheme to get rid of me. I begin to understand that now."

The detective is striving to draw out the bandit. He argues that confidences beget confidences, and, by revealing to him all that he knows, he may be enlightened as to some things he would like to become acquainted with.

The bandit springs to his feet. "The devil you did," he cries.

"Then, you understand all about the Daggett affair?"

"Yes. I know that you are plotting to give young Mordaunt the money."

"Do you think so?" quietly.

"I heard all you said."

"And you are convinced that I am anxious to benefit this popinjay?"

The detective thinks a moment.

"Well, candidly, from my knowledge of your character, Valdoso, I do not think you care two pins for any one outside yourself."

"Thank you. You will think differently after a while. Now, let me tell you, I do *not* care two pins for that murderous rascal, Mordaunt Daggett. In fact, I have a feeling of contempt for myself for having had anything at all to do with him. By the saints! my character is spotless white compared with his. But I am ever anxious to benefit myself. You spoke truly when you said that; and so, when I became posted as to the facts of the case, I naturally felt an eagerness to be the possessor of some of this vast fortune. You heard our conversation, so I can speak plainly to you. The knowledge you will be the richer for when I finish, will not affect my course; for you are helpless, Bill; as helpless as an infant."

A quiet smile on the detective's lips follows the earnest words of the bandit.

"I won't deny it, Valdoso; but I have been in many a tight box before, and have come out on top."

A strange light appears in the eyes of the other.

"You have never been placed in such a position of danger as you are this blessed minute, my man. In an instant I can hurl you to death and destruction." From the look in the bandit's eyes, the detective feels that he is speaking truly. A vague feeling of curiosity enters his mind. Where is the danger? He looks about the cavern; he can see nothing suspicious.

The bandit observes the look. "It is an unseen danger, but a present one, depend on it. You shall understand it all presently. Now listen to me, and mark me well. I will tell you my scheme."

"I first became aware of the anxiety on the part of the Daggetts to learn of the whereabouts of their relative, by reading the advertisements in the various papers. First, the advertisement was for information of his whereabouts only; they evidently thought him living. I did not answer any of them. I knew Hugh Daggett to be dead, and did not care to tell any one what I knew."

"Perhaps you killed him," interrupts the detective.

"No, Bill; I did not kill him. His murderer is dead. Pietro Alvarez killed Hugh Daggett."

"Is this true?"

"Yes. You will understand it all before I am through. As I was saying, I paid no attention to the advertisements until a year ago. Another advertisement appeared, offering a reward for positive proof of the *death* of the man. The reward was large enough to have tempted a poor man to put another to death in order to claim it. This 'ad' I answered, and, in a short time, was in communication with Mordaunt Daggett. I did not give him any idea of the true state of affairs. I merely wrote that I *thought* I could put him in possession of knowledge such as he desired.

"Finally he sent me a letter, which I was to copy, and send to his uncle, signing my name Inigo Balbaso. That letter was to induce the old man to come to America. It succeeded, as you know. The young fellow and I met by appointment at Omaha, and there was laid the plan to dispose of the old gentleman. Previous to this, however, I was moved by the evident anxiety of young Daggett to prove his uncle's death, and investigated the matter. I got at the true facts of the case, and only a short time since. I then determined not to follow the murderous instructions of the young scoundrel, but take them all captive, and compel them to share with me. I could easily have killed the old man if I had felt so inclined. You turned up, and blocked my game."

"Yes; just in time."

"But you did not affect my plans. You rather helped me."

"How?"

"I immediately formed another — a better one. As your band of cowboys rode down on the camp like a whirlwind, I stepped to Mordaunt's side, and whispered that I would return later, and appointed the meeting you witnessed. Then I demanded more money. You know how I succeeded. But one thing prevented me from carrying out the instructions of the younger Daggett — your presence in camp. At least, so I told him. I suggested a scheme to get rid of you. It was this, and you will admit it is a good one: I was to disguise myself, and enter the camp after every one had retired. I knew the place would be guarded, but Mordaunt was to give me the password, and tell me where the teamsters were to be stationed, and, in the darkness, they would easily take me for one of your men. I was to get away with the girl. Her abduction would lead you to follow her. You would thus be out of the camp. I was to be on the look out for you and capture you. Thus far, everything has happened just as I planned."

"Yes. Go on." The detective is anxious to hear the rest.

"Remember, all this was to favor this young villain's desires. The camp, being without you, would be comparatively at the mercy of any invader; for, although your boys would fight well, still we formed a plan to lead them also astray. This part is yet to be carried out. A mounted messenger, clad in cowboy costume, is to ride hurriedly into their midst. He is to announce that you have rescued the girl, but are being pursued, will probably be captured; they are beseeched to come to your aid. Of course, they would do so."

"More than likely." The detective sees the devilish plot begin to assume alarming proportions.

"The messenger is to lead them a wild-goose chase so far out of possible protection to the camp as to leave it and Arthur Daggett at our mercy; I am to send a party of sufficient strength to overpower the remaining teamsters and servants; strong enough, in fact, to wage battle with even your brave boys in case they should return. Old Arthur Daggett is to be killed in the fray, likewise the servants, and so leave but one heir to all this enormous fortune—him, Mordaunt Daggett; for, to guard against the possibility of harm to himself, it was arranged that he was to leave the camp the night following the abduction, and come directly here."

"Horrible!" muttered the detective.

"You think so? A good scheme, though, you must admit."

"Concocted with the fertility of invention of the devil."

"Thanks," smiled the bandit; "I invented it. But to proceed; in order to insure against any mistake on the part of my men, I am to inform them that there is a sum equal to fifty thousand dollars in the outfit, and they are to have it to divide among themselves for their work, it will be well done, Mexican Bill, they will not hesitate.

He speaks positively, with devilish calmness; the detective shudders. All this can take place, and he is powerless to render aid.

"One thing more," and, with a quick gesture, the bandit strikes a match, and lights a cigar. "Young Daggett, who is even now on his way, upon arrival is to be married to his fair cousin, I providing a priest, who is not far from here, who will make the marriage as legal as any in the world, and tie the knot securely. Then Mordaunt Daggett will be the richer by four million dollars. It will not be supposed that he had anything to do with his uncle's death. He will take the proofs, which I shall furnish him, of his other uncle's (Hugh Daggett's) departure from this mundane sphere, and I will settle down, a happy, prosperous old gentleman, with the million I get for my share."

He knocks the ashes from his cigar, quietly, calmly.

The detective does not speak. His mind is tor-

“With a cry of horror, the Detective sees the huge block of stone slowly decend to the floor.”

MEXICAN BILL—Page 87.

tured with the horrible facts of this infernal scheme. How can he prevent it?

"What do you think of it?" the bandit asks.

The detective does not reply. He asks a question:

"And suppose I should happen to make good my escape. Suppose, in some way, I get away from here. Even if all this comes, as you say, your way, don't you suppose that I will see you punished—you and that murderous wretch, Mordaunt Daggett?"

"Of course, if you get away. Ah, that little word *if*. How it upsets the best-laid plans. Mordaunt Daggett will be rich *if* you do not choose to block his game. Not by escape, however; that is impossible. Shall I show you how I have arranged to dispose of you? Would you have an explanation of my words of an hour ago? Step to the entrance of this cave, and I will show you something that, I think, will cause you to give my powers of invention still greater credit. Come."

He arises, and steps to the entrance, the detective following him.

Suddenly he stamps upon the floor, and, with a cry of horror and amazement, the astounded detective sees the block of stone that forms the rear wall of the cavern slowly descend to the floor.

Any one beneath it would surely be crushed, a bleeding, mangled mass!

The bandit sees his agitation, and causes the wall to return to its former position.

"You see, there would not be much chance for you if you were caught beneath that rock."

The brave cowboy feels his heart sink. Not much chance, indeed, if taken unawares.

As they re-enter the cave, the bandit remarks:

"You may imagine that, by quickly running to the spot we have just vacated, that one might escape. I will inform you that the wall opposite the entrance is also movable, and, when the time came, would move in, thus preventing any possibility of escape. Ah! I have things nicely arranged here."

"No doubt of that," bursts from the lips of Mexican Bill.

"But there is no necessity of putting this machinery in operation; it all rests with you," says the bandit.

He has made remarks to the same effect before. What can he be driving at?

"I don't understand you?" cries the detective.

"Sit down. I see you have finished your cigar. Good one, eh? Have another. I have shown you scheme number one. I might just add that the men are even now preparing to start to carry it out. Mordaunt Daggett is on his way here; all that remains to do is to tell my men that fifty thousand dollars in gold awaits them at a certain point not far from here; but a few days' journey, in fact. *This* scheme, and it will be complete, is for the benefit of Mordaunt Daggett. I told you some time ago that I didn't like this young man; I am only willing to benefit him inasmuch as he will bring me fortune. But there is *another* scheme; scheme number two, I call it. Would you like to hear it?"

The mind of the detective is beset with curious thoughts. The man before him is truly a genius for invention; a heartless genius, no doubt, a fiend who will stop at nothing; but a shrewd, calculating man above all. He had best hear the further developing of this man's clever brain.

"Well, go ahead," he says, "I will hear scheme number two."

"Good! As you heard me say during my interview with Mordaunt, Hugh Daggett had a son."

Ah, he had forgotten that. What was to come? He listens breathlessly.

"Scheme number two concerns that son, and, in order to make it a success, I depend on you to assist me. Are you listening?"

"Yes; go on."

The bandit carefully knocks the ashes from his cigar.

CHAPTER IX.

SCHEME NUMBER TWO.

"OF course, you do not know how I came to be mixed up in this affair. I have never told any one that; but I shall tell you, so you can clearly understand me. In the year of '60 I captured the outfit of Hugh Daggett, consisting of himself, wife and servant, a dull fool, by the name of Peter Daniels. The man who drove the team and guided them was killed in the fight which occurred. I captured the three; for I knew that Daggett had deposited five thousand dollars in the bank at Santa Fé, and I wanted it. I carried them all here, to my stronghold, and informed the young husband (who was frantic at the thought of harm coming to his wife), that, in case he could furnish the sum of five thousand dollars within a certain time, I would allow his wife and himself to go free, unharmed, taking the servant with them. To this he agreed, and set out at once. The parting was a sad one; it even affected me a little, my wife, Pepita, very much. She saw that the young wife did not want for anything; and, with the assistance of mother Barbara, an old hag who was the mother of one of my band, made her as comfortable as possible."

The detective has started visibly at the mention of the hag's name.

"Mother Barbara," he mutters; "mother Barbara?"

"Yes," answers the bandit, with a peculiar smile. "Is the name a familiar one?"

"I have heard it before." And he begins to listen eagerly.

"Very likely. You will know where when I have finished. The days passed. Until the morning dawned, the night of which the husband was to be back with the money, I did not convey in any way to the wife the fact that I knew the money was in Santa Fé before her husband had told me so. I professed ignorance of the entire matter. I even asked her, in a suspicious manner, if she was sure the money was there. The understanding was, that, if the husband did not return at the appointed time, she was to die. I made this agreement to assure myself of the quick return of the husband.

"Night came. The husband did not return. I also found five of my men missing, among them Pietro Alvarez. At eleven o'clock I entered the cave where the young wife was lying suffering. I had no idea what caused her pain; but in less than an hour it was all made plain to me, for she died in giving birth to an infant — a boy."

"Ah! So that is how Hugh Daggett's son comes to be a member of your band?" the detective cries.

"Wait; hear me through. In the morning we buried the mother, and discovered the dead bodies of the father and servant. Alvarez had played me false. He had known that Daggett would return at a certain time, and, with four of his comrades, rode out to meet him, killed him, and walked off with the gold.

"The child lived, Barbara and my wife, Pepita, devoting themselves to its welfare. But one day, in the heat of anger, when the boy was about three years of age, I struck him, and threatened to kill him. The next morning both mother Barbara and the child were missing. I instituted vigorous search for the woman, but was unsuccessful. At last I gave it up, and the years rolled by, some ten of them, before I again discovered Hugh Daggett's son. But we will let that rest, at present, and I will unfold scheme number two. By this scheme, but one man will meet his death, and he richly deserves it.

"I know where I can lay my hand on the son. Suppose I were to go to him and say, 'You are the heir to an immense fortune in England. Share with me, and I will show you how to get it.' Then, when Mordaunt Daggett arrives, put him out of the way. The new-found son can wed the daughter of Arthur Daggett, and she can return to her happy father, who will not be injured. Not one hair of his white head shall be harmed. The son will then inherit the money which Mordaunt is plotting for, and all will go merry as a marriage bell. What do you think of scheme number two?"

"More merciful than the other, but is it necessary that this sinful wretch should perish in order to carry it out?"

The bandit's face flushes with hatred and anger.

"Do you suppose for an instant, that I would allow him to share in this, my best scheme. No! Besides, I am playing for a higher stake. By scheme number one, I get only a million. By scheme number two, I get two million and one-half; for I would have it distinctly set down that the son was to give me an equal share in the fortune."

"Was it necessary to entice me here to further the success of your scheme?"

"Decidedly. For, shall I tell you, shall I show you how deeply you are interested in this?"

The voice has grown hoarse with excitement and eagerness. He bends forward, his hot breath on the young man's cheek.

"Yes, yes; tell me." The detective is growing excited. He is impressed by the man's manner.

"*You are Hugh Daggett's son?*"

It has come like an overwhelming avalanche. The words ring through the detective's ears. Yes, it must be true. He can remember his early years; old mother Barbara, who raised him to the age of thirteen; her death—she showed a desire to tell him something upon her deathbed, but passed away too quickly—his life among the cowboys, who gave him the name of Mexican Bill, from the fact of old Barbara's nationality. It all comes to him, and he rests his head in his hands, overcome by the knowledge thus thrust upon him. And this man before him, this clever, heartless, scheming wretch—he has told him all; told him of his father's murder, his mother's death; and he wishes to enrich himself by appealing to the cupidity of him, the son, who has never known a parent's love. With lightning rapidity he runs it over in his mind; he feels the eyes of Juan Valdoso upon him; he wishes to wed his beautiful cousin. That would not be hard, for he knows he loves her, feels that she would love him; but can he willingly lend his aid to assist in the death of his cousin, Mordaunt Daggett? As base as he knows him to be, he shrinks from it.

"Think, my boy, think well. Think of the fair creature confined in a cave close by, who, if you refuse to aid me, will, in a short time, be wedded to the wretch you know Mordaunt Daggett to be; think of the bloodthirsty men who are ready, at the word of command, to ride to the camp of a helpless old man, to strike him down in cold blood; think of your own horrible fate, crushed and mangled by the heavy wall which totters behind you. Think and decide."

The man is thinking — ah, so hard; but he cannot see his way clear. At last a wave of inspiration sweeps over his brain.

"I have decided," he says, quietly, controlling his emotion.

"Well," eagerly.

"I will agree to your second scheme, with one exception."

"And that?"

"You stated some time ago that your reason for wanting Mordaunt Daggett put out of the way was, that you did not want him to receive his share of the fortune, as it would deprive you of your equal share."

"Yes, damn him; I don't want him to have any."

"Hear me. I dislike the thought of this man's death. I agree with you that he merits punishment. If I am released, I shall see that he gets it; but I do not wish to be instrumental in his death, and such a death. I will assist you all I can. I will give you my share of this fortune if you will release me and allow me to go free with Miss Millicent."

The bandit's eyes drop.

"That is not what I bargained for," he mutters.

"How do I know but what you will play me false at any rate," cries the detective. "You told Mordaunt Daggett that Hugh Daggett's son was a member of your band. How do I know but what you will produce some one of your gang of cutthroats, after getting me to sign away half of this fortune, and, after putting me away, proclaim him the son?"

"That suspicion does not do you credit, Bill, even if it exists in your mind, which I doubt. You know that there is not a man in my band but what is well known, both to his comrades and others. If I could have done this, I might not have taken the trouble to bring Mexican Bill to my stronghold. No, Bill; there is not the slightest danger of such a thing happening. Listen; either you agree to do as I say, or Arthur Daggett dies, his daughter meets a fate almost as bad, and Mordaunt Daggett becomes the heir."

"I don't mind telling you something else, Bill; I may as well do so now that I have begun. *I think I can manage it with young Daggett to divide equally with me when I once get him; what do you think about it?*"

The detective detects the significant leer in the man's words. True, the young scoundrel once in his power, he might be forced to do almost anything; and, in case he did — the detective shuddered — Arthur Daggett's life sacrificed, the fair creature wedded to that villain; no, it must not be.

"I will accept your proposition," he says. He can assist them better at liberty than by being confined; he can keep an eye on the treacherous Mexican, to guard against a breach of faith.

"You are a sensible young man," remarks Valdoso, with a smile of triumph. "I will leave you for a while; when I return I shall bring the papers to be signed, also witnesses; then you will be set at liberty, under proper surveillance of course, and to-night — ah, to-night! the wedding takes place."

And, with a chuckle and a low bow, Juan Valdoso leaves the cave.

CHAPTER X.

WARNED — SCHEME NUMBER THREE.

LEFT alone, the detective sits upon the skins, wrapped in thought.

How can he outwit this devilish plotter? How can he manage to foil his well-laid plans?

"I am helpless as I am," he mutters, rising and pacing the cell. "But I would almost prefer death to becoming the accomplice of this wretch, to being the means of enriching him. Something may occur. I can think and act better if free. Yes, I must sign this paper, and then trust to fortune to enable me to wrest it from him. So, I am Hugh Daggett's son. It seems like a dream to me. His words — can they be true? They must be, or he would not spare me; I would have been dead long before this. I will await developments."

He takes another pull from the flask of wine, and awaits the return of Valdoso.

A faint noise outside.

"He is coming," he mutters, without looking up. But the next moment he finds he is mistaken, for he hears his name called in a low, musical voice, a woman's voice. It proceeds from outside the entrance to the cave. He rises to his feet, and pushes aside the blanket *portière*. He can see no one — no one there.

He stands bewildered. Could he have been mistaken? No, he hears it again. It sounds as if above him.

"Look up, señor," it says. "Push back the blankets, and you can see me when the light shines out in the passage."

He holds the blankets so the light can reflect into the passage, and then, looking up, sees the face of a woman looking down at him from an opening in the wall; the face of one no longer young, but still divinely, royally beautiful.

"Who are you?" he cries, in amazement.

"Pepita, Juan Valdoso's wife."

"What are you doing there?" He is truly astounded.

"Listen! I have come to warn you. I followed my husband until I saw him enter the passage which leads to your prison. I hastily made my way to this place, which is in an adjoining cave. I would be enabled to hear what was said. I have heard. I waited until I was sure that Juan was really gone, and then I called you. Do not trust him."

"I do not understand you."

"My husband does not intend to keep faith with you. Upon his return, he will inform you that he has been considering your proposition to sign to him your share of the fortune, and has concluded to accept it. He will tell you that he will allow you to go free, taking the young girl with you, and will permit you to leave the cave, where you now are. But he will *not* allow you to leave the place entirely, nor will he release the girl. When Mordaunt Daggett arrives, you will again be confined, and finally put out of the way, and the girl will be forced into the marriage with her cousin."

"But in what way will he better himself by so doing?"

"Having a paper signed by you, the only son of Hugh Daggett, he can claim your share of the money after your death. He will, of course, keep Mordaunt in ignorance of this, until he has received the million from him. Then he will bring forward his claim, and force Mordaunt to give it to him. Of course, the young man will be obliged to do so, as he will not dare to run the risk of being exposed as the accomplice of Juan Valdoso, the celebrated bandit, of being associated with him in the death of his uncle Arthur. He will be rid of an enemy — a dangerous one, as he knows you to be — and will be the possessor of the lion's share of the fortune; the million from young Daggett, and your share, which will amount to one million six hundred and sixty-six thousand dollars. Do you begin to see *why* Juan Valdoso would break faith with you?"

She speaks hurriedly, and the detective sees that it is plausible.

"By God!" he cries. "He is a deep one."

"Deeper than the sea. He thinks me faithful to his interests; has explained all to me. Further, Arthur Daggett is to meet his death. Directly upon the arrival of Mordaunt, the assassins are to be dispatched upon their mission of murder."

"Great heavens! and must I stand by, knowing all this, and not stretch out a hand to help him?" He groans in his anguish of spirit.

"Follow my instructions, and you may be able to thwart him in his design." She speaks impressively.

"Tell me! instruct me! quick! I will obey you!"

"Very well, then. In a short time he will return with the papers, to be signed by you. They will be so worded that they will stand good in law, were you living or dead. Appear to be perfectly willing to sign; but, as you dip your pen in the ink, in some way break the bottle, and spill the contents. He will naturally be angry. You can appease it."

"How?"

"I will furnish you with a small vial, inclosed in a wooden case, such as travelers use. This vial will contain a fluid which will appear as jet-black ink at the time of writing, but which will fade, leaving no trace, in twenty-four hours. You can produce this, stating that you always carry writing materials, and sign with that."

"He will take you from the cave, and act in a very friendly manner toward you. But be watchful. You will, during the course of the day, see me standing near the entrance to one of the caves. When I disappear, follow me, and I will put you in the way of making good your escape. But you must be careful; Valdoso is as suspicious as a deer, and as watchful as a hawk."

"You are a shrewd, clever woman," cries the detective. "Knowing Valdoso as you do, apparently anxious to thwart him, why do you remain with him?"

"Alas! señor, I love him. Despite his cruelty, notwithstanding his crimes, I love him. I do this because I wish to spare him further bloodshed. He has sin enough to answer for now. But he will return soon. Watch, here is the sympathetic ink I spoke of. Catch it as I let it fall."

He sees a fair, shapely arm thrust out of the aperture; sees a small, dark object in the small hand. It falls through space, and the next moment he has the neat little wood-encased vial in his hands.

"Thank you," he murmurs, gratefully. "You are indeed a dear friend. I shall never forget you."

"Farewell," she answers, and is gone.

He re-enters the cave, and, secreting the vial, waits for Valdoso.

He has not long to wait, for the bandit is soon with him, accompanied by two men; one a member of his band, the other a little, wizened old man clothed as a priest.

"I have kept you waiting, my boy," cries the false one; "but I had to have the papers drawn up, and it took some time. Allow me to introduce my companions: This is Antonio Cintelli; this, Father Asquirel. He will officiate at the wedding to-night. Gentlemen, this is Mr. William Daggett, the only son of Hugh Daggett, deceased. I believe that is about right."

The detective nods his head; the scoundrels, who have been made known to him, do likewise.

"Now for the papers. I have been considering your proposition of the morning, William; that of signing away your share in the fortune, in my favor. I have consulted with my holy friend, Father Asquirel, and we have both come to the conclusion that it would be the most merciful thing to do to accept it. The father dislikes the idea of bloodshed; and, really, over a million and a half will be a pretty good thing for me. So, sign the papers; you will then be allowed to have the agreeable society of my good followers, and can marry the girl, and take her with you. I think that the best scheme."

"Scheme number three," remarks the detective.

The bandit shoots a glance of inquiry at him. But the detective does not move a muscle of his face; so he breaks out in a torrent of laughter:

"Yes, just so; scheme number three."

"And Mordaunt. What is to become of him?"

"Oh, I will send him about his business when he arrives."

Not an appearance of deceit in the face of the bandit as he speaks, but Mexican Bill knows he is lying. It has all occurred as the woman Pepita has said.

"I am ready to sign," he announces, quietly.

"Good! Here are the papers," spreading them out.

Bill glances over them, truly cleverly written.

"Pen and ink," he says.

"Ah, we don't need them. Ink is so liable to get spilled, I don't carry it about me. I have an indelible pencil; that is just as good."

The detective feels his heart sink. No ink, only an indelible pencil. The bandit holds it in his hand. It is one of those aniline pencils which are considered in law as valid as ink. What can he do? If he signs with that pencil, the bandit can claim the property. But he must not hesitate; he takes it, he prepares to sign. Ah! he sees a way out of the difficulty. The pencil case is an automatic one. It is necessary to press a spring upon the end to allow the lead to fall in position to write. He turns to make some remark to the priest, and, as he does so, presses the spring and the lead falls upon the floor. As if unconscious of the fact, he puts his foot upon it and crushes it to powder. *The pencil is useless!* Now he can use his sympathetic ink. He makes as if to sign, then looks up with a smile.

"I don't think I can use your pencil, Valdoso," he says, "there is no lead in it."

"Oh, you don't understand it. Press the knob on the end. The lead is inside."

The detective hands him the pencil.

"You put it in position," he says. "You understand it."

Valdoso takes the pencil. He presses the spring. No lead.

"Why, that is strange," he cries. "It must have dropped out."

He looks around the floor. Bill does not move his foot.

"Well, it ain't here," the bandit says at last. "I suppose I'll have to go for some ink."

Now is the time.

"I always carry ink with me," the detective says, producing the little traveler's companion. "If you wish, I will use this."

"All right. I guess the boys did not search you very well, or they would have confiscated this."

"It is so small that it probably escaped their notice. Have you a pen?"

"There is one connected with this pencil-case," adjusting it. "There you are. Go ahead."

The papers are signed, and, with an evil look of triumph, the bandit calls upon his companions to sign as witnesses.

This done, he carefully folds the papers, and puts them in his pocket. Then, slapping the detective on the back, he cries:

"Well, that is over with. Come. You shall breathe the fresh air again. We will have a sumptuous repast together. Come." And, leading the way, he conducts them from the cave — the heavy wall which blocks the entrance moves easily at his touch, disclosing a narrow passage — through this, out into the open air.

With a feeling of relief, the detective inhales the fresh air. He is free at any rate. Now he may be able to accomplish something. It must be done in twenty-four hours, for, at the end of that time, the bandit may discover that he has been tricked, and there will be little possibility of escape then.

"Ho, Pedro!" shouts the bandit chief to one of his band, "have a royal feast spread in the open air. My dear friend, Mexican Bill, is going to do me the honor of dining with me."

The fellow was sullenly casting a glance of hatred at the detective.

The bandit consults his watch. "Nearly three o'clock," he says. "Have everything ready at four."

The fellow hurries away.

"I expect young Daggett at about that time," he adds, to Bill. "We will eat together."

"Don't you think that an unwise thing to do?" suggests the detective. "It will arouse suspicion in his mind to see us on friendly terms."

"What difference will that make? He will know you as his relative soon, at any rate. But, if you prefer, we will dine alone."

The detective has been somewhat taken aback at the bandit's proposition. The woman had said that he was going to keep his knowledge of the existing relationship a secret. But he had proposed bringing them together. For what purpose? Perhaps he had not meant it.

The bandit seems in the best of spirits, genial, jovial, joking with the man who is on the lookout for danger.

They wander about the stronghold of the robbers until the meal is ready, and then the chief conducts him to the table.

It is spread beneath the shade of a large tree; and Bill observes, as he takes his place, that he can command a view to the entrances of the various caves where the bandits live.

The meal is really a sumptuous one, and he eats heartily, following the example of his host, who is possessed of an enormous appetite. He feels easy in his mind; he knows the food is free from poisonous matter. The chief does not wish to destroy him in this manner, it seems.

They have just finished, and have lighted cigars, when Bill sees a member of the band hurrying toward his chief. He is evidently on business of importance, for he is approaching rapidly.

"The Englishman, Señor Capitan," he says, as he reaches them.

"Ah! your cousin," announces the chief, turning to Bill. "I must go meet him. Remain here and enjoy your smoke. I may not return for an hour or so, but don't mind me, make yourself at home."

He follows the man toward the narrow, rocky path that lead to the bandits' stronghold. He is soon lost to sight.

Mordaunt Daggett has arrived. At dark the emissaries of destruction will be dispatched to the camp of Arthur Daggett. He must act soon.

He hears the musical tones of a woman murmuring the words of a Mexican love song. He looks up, and sees Pepita standing at the entrance to one of the caves. No one is in sight. He hurries toward her.

She smiles and disappears. The next moment he is following her along the subterranean passage that leads to one of the caves.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ARRIVAL OF MORDAUNT DAGGETT.

As Valdoso hurries along the path to meet young Daggett, he smiles covertly — a smile of triumph, of self-congratulation.

"I think I have thrown him completely off his guard," he mutters. "That allusion to inviting Mordaunt to eat with us, I think, had a good effect, and the good meal, the fine cigar, have done their work. Bah! I thought him shrewd; he is but a plaything in my hands."

He has reached the spot where Mordaunt, showing the effect of his long ride, is awaiting him. The bandit notices that the young man looks pale and careworn. His eyes are circled with a dark line, are baggy underneath, showing loss of rest.

"Ah! so you found your way here," cries the bandit.

"Yes, and I'm nearly played out," mutters the young fellow.

"I'll soon fix that all right; come, you need a good, square meal, some wine, and you'll feel like a new man."

Daggett dismounts, and follows his elder in crime; not his superior, except in point of experience, for this young fellow has a heart as indifferent to feelings of remorse and shame as the most hardened criminal. He could plunder, murder and pillage, without one qualm. Valdoso calls a black-looking scoundrel, and directs him to look after Daggett's horse, then leads the way to his quarters.

"How have you succeeded?" asks Daggett sullenly, as they are seated.

"Everything has turned out just as I said. The lovely girl is waiting for her *dear* cousin. The redoubtable detective is in durance vile. The priest is ready at a moment's notice, and behold, the bridegroom is here."

He speaks in a light, jesting tone; Mordaunt scowls.

"Be serious. All this is good enough. But you remember, Valdoso, you told me that there was a living son. He must be done away with."

"I have arranged for all that."

"The girl must be ready to accompany me in the morning."

"She will feel gratified at your earnest desire to remove her from our contaminating influence. I think *she* will be willing enough to leave us."

"You have sent the men to the camp?"

"They depart at nightfall."

"Good." A moment's thought.

"Valdoso," suspiciously, "I must see this son of Hugh Daggett die, with my own eyes."

Valdoso starts.

"Well, you *are* a suspicious one," he says.

"I know my man," answers the young villain.

"You will probably see him die;" and the bandit averts his eyes.

Silence for the moment, then Daggett says:

"I would like to see this man. Does he resemble me in any way? Does he bear a family resemblance? He speaks curiously."

"No; I think not," replies the bandit. "You can see him," he adds.

"When?" eagerly.

"I will have him wait on you at the table, as soon as your supper is prepared."

"Good. I will have ample time to observe him."

A man enters the cave.

"The food is prepared," he announces.

"Good! Send Alberto with it."

The man departs.

"Is that the name you have given Hugh Daggett's son?" asks Mordaunt, as the fellow leaves them alone.

"Yes, hark! He comes."

The young man leans back in the camp chair he is occupying, his eyes fixed on the entrance; he does not observe the smile of contempt on the lip of his companion. The curtains are shoved aside, and a young man enters with a tray; a tall, dark, handsome young fellow, attired in full Mexican costume.

"Hugh Daggett's son," remarks the bandit, in a tone loud enough to be heard by the newcomer.

"He will hear you," remonstrated Daggett, angrily.

"No matter; he cannot understand, he speaks and knows only Spanish."

"Ah!" and Daggett looks with intense interest upon the silent, handsome man.

He leaves the cave.

"What do you think of him?" asks Valdoso.

"He does not resemble his father."

He eats his meal in silence. He is hungry, and is anxious to see his beautiful cousin.

"Now, conduct me to Millicent," he demands, rising from the table.

"Ah! the lover is eager to greet his loved one," sneers the bandit.

"A truce to your sneers, Valdoso," cries the young man, impatiently; "conduct me to her."

"Your honor shall be obeyed," answers the bandit, mockingly; and, drawing back the curtains that conceal the entrance to a narrow passage in the rear, he disappears, followed by Daggett.

For fully five minutes he hurries along, and then, stopping suddenly, he turns to the left, and the next moment Mordaunt sees the glimmer of a light before him. He approaches it, and is soon standing before his cousin.

"Miss Daggett, your cousin Mordaunt," announces Valdoso, and leaves them together.

The girl has been reclining upon a couch of furs. She rises with a quick, impetuous movement as Valdoso speaks, and, putting back her hair from her eyes with one jeweled hand, she confronts him.

"Dear Millicent," he murmurs, stepping toward her.

Her action frightens him, for, with a cry of horror, of loathing, she recoils from him.

"You!" she cries; "you dare to approach me! and with an endearing word upon your lips! Scoundrel!"

He blushes.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Mean! Do you not know? Hear me! I know you are instrumental in my being here. I heard the ruffians who brought me here talking about it in Spanish. I understand Spanish. I heard the story of your base treachery."

"I did it all for love of you," he murmurs.

She looks bewildered.

"For love of me?" she repeats. "Had me stolen from my father through love of me? Speak! Explain!" She cannot comprehend his words.

He approaches her.

"I loved you so. You were so cold to me. I allowed myself to be carried away by my evil passions. I *so* wanted you for myself alone that I arranged to have you abducted. Forgive me, dear; do not blame me; I was mad."

He kneels at her feet; he presses his lips to the hem of her dress. She looks down upon him contemptuously.

"And did you think I would love you more by so doing?" she asks, coldly.

"I don't know. I did not stop to think. I only gave way to my evil passion."

He is still kneeling. She draws away from him. She sits upon the couch, wondrously calm now.

"And, now that I am in your power, what do you propose to do?" she asks.

He hesitates. Her knowledge of his baseness has taken him by surprise. He has had another story to tell; that she had been abducted and held for ransom by the bandits. He had come to rescue her, to pay the money and take her back. But he had not been able to use that fiction. She knows all; so he hesitates.

"Ah, you hesitate," she murmurs. "You did not lay your plans well. You did not determine what was to be done with your victim after she had been torn from her father's side."

He paces the cave.

"Yes," he cries suddenly, "I *had* determined, I still am determined, you must become my wife."

She looks at him in utter amazement.

"Your wife?" she cries, in tones of surprise, of horror. "You imagine for one instant that I will be your wife?"

"Why not?" he speaks harshly.

"Why not? You seem to think it a matter of course that I will accept you now after you have subjected me to so much sorrow, such humiliation.

You seem to think that I will fly to your arms. Never! I would prefer to die in this horrible place, never to look upon my father's face again, rather than become your wife. The name of wife is a holy one. The true wife must honor and obey her husband. I could not honor you. I detest you; I loathe you. You are a creeping snake, a contemptible dog."

She has risen in her anger and faces him, looking divinely beautiful as she stands, robed in white, the loose *négligé* wrapper she had donned to sleep in the night she was abducted, her magnificent hair falling in heavy, waving masses about her shoulders.

He recoils for an instant, his dark face flushed and angry. The next he faces her; he seizes her wrist, and hisses in her ear.

"So, my lady," he cries, "that is your opinion of me, is it. *That* is your answer. Well, let me tell *you*, you are in my power. You are surrounded by those who will do my bidding. You shall be forced to become my wife, despite your protests, despite your tears, if you should resort to them. You are mine. There is not one to say me nay. Your father is dead, you are alone in the world, dependent upon my mercy."

She hears the words, feels his hot breath upon her cheek. Her head grows dizzy, a blur comes before her eyes. She feels that she is helpless, and, with the cry, "O God! my father," she falls in a deathlike swoon in his arms.

He looks down upon her pale face in alarm. He sees the white eyelids fluttering, feels the heart throbbing, as he holds her to him.

He lays her gently upon the couch. He has gone too far, has said too much.

"I did not intend to tell her of her father's death," he mutters; "But she drove me mad with her words, with her angry, flashing eyes."

He looks about the cave for something to restore her to consciousness. Ah! a jug of water. He sprinkles some of it upon her pale face, forces some between her lips.

With a long-drawn, convulsive sigh, she comes to herself. The fluttering eyelids slowly open, and she looks up in his face.

"Millicent!" he cries, "You are yourself again!"

"Leave me," she murmurs. "Go!"

He stands, sullen and irresolute.

"Come," he says at last, "you may as well look at this matter in a sensible light. You are at my mercy. You had better say yes—gracefully. I will not make you a bad husband."

"O God. O merciful Heaven! Is there no escape from this fiend? Must I yield to him?" she sobs, rocking her form to and fro upon the edge of the couch.

"Call upon Heaven as much as you choose," he sneers sullenly. "No one can help you. God's ears are closed."

"Liar!" He hears a manly voice thunder in his ear, "God's ear is never closed to the cry of the helpless."

He turns to speak. The next moment he is thrown to the floor of the cave, and, despite his struggle, is bound and blindfolded.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET OF THE TIN BOX.

DOWN into the bowels of the earth the gallant detective follows Pepita, the wife of the bandit king. He does not fear treachery from her, for the first glance into the depths of her liquid dark eyes has assured him of her truth and honesty. So, with a heart beating with eagerness, a mind filled with vague curiosity, he follows on. Before him he can see the quickly gliding form; so graceful, so lithe for one of her age. She is making rapid headway, and he quickens his footsteps to reach her side. She halts before a heavy curtain of velvet, and, pushing it to one side, turns and beckons him to follow, and the next moment is lost to sight.

She has entered the cavern. He is soon with her, and finds, with astonishment, that the interior of this apartment is furnished in the most costly and magnificent style. Soft carpets and Turkish rugs are spread out upon the stone floor; massive tables and chairs of ebony and mahogany are placed about the cave; rare tapestries and curtains of velvet and gold hide the walls.

He stands and looks about him.

"Well, this *is* clever," he cries. She does not speak, but has carefully searched the apartment, looking behind articles of furniture, curtains and *portières*, as if to assure herself that there is no one in hiding. Then she reclines upon a velvet-covered divan, and motions him to an ottoman near her.

He obeys the motion.

She begins speaking hurriedly and constrainedly.

"Mexican Bill, what I have to say must be said quickly; for almost at any moment Valdoso may choose to visit me, and he must not find you here. Do not ask questions, but listen, and remember all you hear. You heard, from Juan Valdoso, this morning, that you were the only son of Hugh Daggett, and that he had proofs of the fact; but he did not tell you where those proofs were, and did not produce them. He never *had* any idea of keeping faith with you, even as I have told you before. You asked me this morning why I still remained with Valdoso, why I suffered myself to endure the life of horrible crime of which he is the instigator. I told you I loved him. Alas, but too true; for, in spite of all, I still love Juan Valdoso; I cannot tear it from my heart. But there is a story to tell — a story which you must know, and then, when you understand all, I shall furnish you with the proofs, which will reveal to the world who and what you are. I have them. They have been intrusted to me by Valdoso."

She stops; the detective leans forward, and cries eagerly:

"You have those papers here?"

"Yes, here." She rises, and goes to a small brass-bound box on the opposite side of the cave; she opens it with a key which she has suspended by a ribbon about her neck, and removes a small lacquered tin box, what is known as a cash box; this she brings to the young man.

"In that box are all of Hugh Daggett's papers, and the proofs of your identity. I will show them to you after I have told you my life story. I know you are impatient, but it is necessary you should hear me before I open the box."

"Why? Has your story anything to do with Hugh Daggett's papers?" He speaks curiously; a strange look comes to her eyes.

"You will understand when I have spoken," she murmurs, in a low tone.

He shrugs his shoulders, and composes himself to listen. With averted eyes, she begins.

"I am the only daughter of Señor Andre Pedrillo, of Barcelona. My father, a man of great wealth, had engaged me in marriage, when yet quite young, to a man I detested; first, because he was many years my senior; second, because I loved another, a handsome, daring officer in the army. Need I say that this was the man you know as Juan Valdoso? My father was stern, and, unheeding my protests, married me to the man I hated, a noble of our land. My married life was anything but pleasant. I received the advances of my husband with coldness and hatred. I loved the other, and met him frequently. The knowledge of these meetings was made known to my husband by one I had trusted, and he challenged my paramour (as he termed him, though God knows I was as pure as an unborn babe) to a duel.

"I was a witness to the fight. I saw my husband fall, pierced by the rapier of him I loved. He died almost immediately. I ran to his bleeding corpse, upbraiding myself as the cause of it all.

"My lover drew me away. 'It is over,' he said. 'He is dead, and you are mine. Come.'

"Without a moment's preparation, without even returning to the house, I fled with him. We left the country, taking passage upon a sailing vessel, which brought us to Mexico. We were married by an old padre in the City of Mexico.

"Shortly after our marriage, my husband revealed to me his true character — that of a bandit. He had been instrumental in causing the loss of life and property to hundreds in our native country. He proposed to organize a band of desperadoes here. His words fell like ice upon my heart. I pleaded with him. Kneeling at his feet, with tears in my eyes, I besought him to give up this life, but to no purpose. He was resolved. He could not return to Spain; he must remain in Mexico. I was obliged to submit, and have been an unwilling witness to scenes of heartless cruelty, of fiendish crime."

She hesitates for a moment, the detective watching her, with pity in his dark eyes — eyes so like her own.

She begins again, then stops. A slight noise in the passage. She arises, with a startled look in her eyes, and glides noiselessly to the heavy curtains.

The detective, with beating heart, arises to his feet and listens. Yes; the noise increases in volume. *Some one is walking along the passage toward the cave.*

She turns, with the white look of fear upon her face.

"Valdoso!" she whispers. "Fly!"

He looks about him in bewilderment. Fly! but where? He turns to find some place of hiding. Too late!

The curtains are shoved aside, and the bandit king stands in the opening.

He looks in amazement upon the scene — a look that changes to fierce anger as he sees the detective and his wife. Then he strides toward her and roughly seizes her wrist.

"What does this mean!" he hisses, turning her toward him with brutal force.

"Juan, hear me!" She is at his feet.

"Hear you! I am waiting to hear you. Explain, and do not tempt me beyond endurance."

His breath is coming in quick gasps. His eyes are fierce and terrible in his anger.

She tries to invent some excuse; she sobs out a few unintelligible words.

He does not hear her. His eyes are roving about the cave. He is thinking. Suddenly, with a cry, he throws her from him. He has seen the tin box.

He springs toward it; but the detective sees the movement, and seizes it. He holds it tightly.

"No, Juan Valdoso. This is *my* property," the young man cries.

The bandit recoils.

"Your property!" he hisses. "Damn you! poor imbecile, fool! all here is mine! this woman, this place, the hundreds of men who but await the sound of my whistle—you! All is mine! Don't arouse me! Be warned! I am a devil when opposed. I will tear you in pieces if you attempt to thwart me. Give me that box, and then I will listen *calmly* to your explanation."

He is a fearful sight to behold, as he stands frothing at the mouth from the intensity of his passion; his wild eyes glaring, his stern features convulsed.

The young man clutches the box so much more firmly.

"I do not fear you, bandit," he cried, drawing himself haughtily erect. "Foam! rage! curse! You are but a pitiful object to look upon—not a fearful one. I have heard coyotes snarl before."

"Give me that box."

"Come and take it."

The bandit hesitates; then he says, in a low, sardonic tone:

"I shall do so in one moment. Before I do so, I will tell you something. I do this *now*, for the reason that, when I am through with you, you will not be in a fit condition to understand me. The contents of that box will never be of benefit to you, for you will *never* leave this place alive. Understand me! I am going to kill you before this woman, my wife, who seems to take an interest in you. My men are speeding on their way to the camp of Arthur Daggett. Ah, you start. Well, it is so. To-morrow he and his people will be so many lifeless corpses. At this moment, Mordaunt Daggett is in the cave with the beautiful Millicent, and in an hour she will be his wife. I tell you all this, for you must die knowing how helpless you are to prevent me from carrying out my plans, how foolish you were to trust me, your implacable enemy. Now I am going to kill you!"

He hisses the words through his set teeth, and, drawing his keen-edged poinard, he sprang forward.

The woman struggles to her feet. She throws herself upon him.

"Juan!" she cries, beseechingly. "Juan! do not kill him!"

With a curse, he throws her from him. She falls with a thud upon the floor. As she does so, the detective springs upon the bandit. He seizes the hand that clutches the shining knife, and endeavors to force it from him.

Backward, forward, from one side of the cave to the other, these two strong men struggle. The detective is no child; he is a trained athlete, and is more than an equal for the man who is eager to destroy him. He presses him back, and, with a final effort, putting forth all his strength, he throws him heavily upon the floor, his head striking the edge of the brass-bound box.

The bandit lies insensible, the blood coursing down over his rich dress from a wound in his head.

Hurriedly Mexican Bill removes his sash, and binds his hands behind him; then, finding a rawhide lariat upon the floor, he performs a similar service for his feet and legs. Then he turns his attention to the woman. She opens her eyes as he bends over her; she struggles to her feet.

"Where is he?" she murmurs.

Bill points to the prostrate form.

"He is not dead!" she cries.

"No; only insensible."

She turns to him quickly, passionately.

"For the love of heaven fly!" she cries. "Fly before he recovers consciousness. Take the passage to the right; it will lead you to the cavern where the girl is confined. Hasten to her, and leave this place; and, oh, do not allow yourself to be taken; you *must* not die."

He hesitates.

"But you," he says.

"Do not think of me. He will not harm me. When he recovers I will be obliged to unbind him, and he will search the country for you. I will delay him. I have chloroform. I will administer some of it to him. But hasten, or all will be lost."

He grasps her hands; he presses them to his lips.

"God bless you!" he cries. "You are a true friend."

She murmurs some unintelligible words. He grasps the tin box, and hurriedly leaves the cavern; on to the right, to the cell where Millicent Daggett is a prisoner.

He hears the sound of voices in anger. He distinguishes the words of her whom he seeks, and her villainous cousin.

"God's ears are closed!" he hears the man say.

The next moment he is in the cave. He is upon the wretch who stands before the white-robed maiden, and bears him to the rocky floor of the cavern, binding and blindfolding him.

Then he turns, and raises the insensible form of the girl in his arms (for she has fainted again at his entrance), and bears her from the cave, his heart beating with intense joy, his brain devising some way of escape.

He holds the tin box by the handle upon the top. He must not lose that; it contains proofs of his identity.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLIGHT — THE PURSUIT.

THROUGH a long, dark passage Mexican Bill pursues his way, stumbling along in the pitchy blackness of the subterranean passage, on until in the distance he sees the stars twinkling in the sky before him.

He knows it is the entrance to the caverns.

Never halting, still bearing the insensible form of the girl in his arms, he remembers he is unarmed. What can he do? What possible chance can he have if attacked or pursued? None whatever. He must in some way obtain arms; how, he does not know; he cannot stop to think; but, with a prayer to Heaven, he continues on hoping. As he draws near the entrance, he hears the sound of revelry without — voices raised in boisterous glee and song. Evidently the bandits are enjoying themselves. The sound grows so intense as he approaches nearer the open air and liberty, that he halts for a moment, putting his precious burden gently down, and listens.

He hears a deep-drawn sigh from the lips of his charge, and knows she is returning to consciousness, and, even as he thinks, she whispers, " Where am I?" in a frightened voice. He assures her of her safety, telling her that he will protect her and save her from the fate she dreads.

It is so dark that he cannot see her face; but, by the quick, impulsive movement which she makes, he knows she is satisfied and trusts him.

" Remain here for one moment," he whispers; " I must investigate."

" I will follow you," she says, fearfully. " I will be by your side."

He cautions her to be as quiet as possible, and noiselessly proceeds toward the entrance. She is behind him.

He stealthily peers out.

Yes, he was right; the bandits are carousing. He sees them gathered about a blazing fire, kindled, not for the purpose of warmth (for the weather is warm), but for light. In the ruddy glare he can see their dark, fierce faces — can see them drinking and smoking.

And, more than this, he sees, leaning against the rocky wall, near the entrance to the cavern, a stack of rifles, some belts of cartridges and revolvers. They have relieved themselves of the weight of their arms, the better to enjoy their spree.

With a prayer of thankfulness to God, he creeps stealthily toward the weapons, and possesses himself of two belts, two braces of revolvers (six-shooters), and a Winchester repeating rifle. He has secured a brace of the revolvers for the girl. He does not know whether she can use them or not, but he thinks she can carry them, at any rate.

He finds her awaiting him. "All is well," he murmurs. "I am armed." He straps the belt and heavy revolvers about her delicate waist. They are heavy, but she does not complain; then, seeing that those in his possession are loaded, he bids her follow him, and creeps along in the shadow of the rock until the risk of being seen is not so great, and then plunges into the narrow strip of forest that skirts the plateau. Here he halts for an instant.

"We have arms," he mutters, as if to himself, "but no ponies."

"I think I know where they are kept," she whispers.

"Do you? How do you know?"

"I saw where the men put them the morning we arrived."

"Good." He feels that everything is coming his way; everything favors him.

"We will be obliged to pass those men to reach the spot," she murmurs.

His heart sinks. How can that be done without detection. But they must try. Every moment is precious. He takes her hand, and creeps through the trees, toward the fire. He is within twenty feet of the drinking, smoking bandits, when a shout rings out upon the air, and a man runs toward them. He shouts some words in Spanish, and Bill knows that Valdoso has been found bound. The men around the fire spring to their feet; all is confusion, they hurry into the cavern.

"Now is our time," whispers the detective, and, with the fair girl by his side, he hurries past the fire, along the plateau, to the spot where Millicent has seen the ponies corraled.

Fortune is on their side, for they find several of the little beasts, saddled and bridled, tied to some posts along the edge of the corral. He assists her into the saddle of one, and springs upon the back of another, and then, with the rifle slung over his shoulder, tightly clutching the tin box, he urges his pony down the rocky path.

In the confusion and haste, he has not stopped to select any particular animal; but his heart fills with joy as he recognizes his own faithful little beast in the one he bestrides, and knows that he is safe to distance his pursuers, providing the animal which bears the girl can keep pace with him.

Clatter! clatter! along the narrow path they fly. Hark! the sound of pursuit; hoarse, angry voices; cries of savage hatred, are borne on the night air to the ears of the fugitives.

"Oh, God! If they should overtake us," bursts from the white lips of the girl.

"Trust in me; I will save you," murmurs the detective. He means to try, and ominously loosens the pistols in his belt.

They have only about ten minutes start, but, if the ponies hold out, there is a chance of escape.

With compressed lips, silent as the grave, the long-haired detective rides like the wind, the girl urging on her pony, and riding close behind him.

With consternation, Bill hears the little beast panting behind him, and the truth flashes upon his mind that the pony will not be able to keep up. He informs Millicent of this.

"I thought so," she murmured.

But they keep on, on, until, with a gasp, the little beast staggers and falls.

Luckily the girl leap off his back, and alights safely upon her feet. The moon breaks forth from under a cloud as the little animal gives out, and, in the light, the girl cries:

"I know this pony. He belongs to our camp."

The truth comes to Bill. She has been riding the pony upon whose back Mordaunt Daggett has ridden to the outlaw's stronghold.

The beast has had a long, tiresome journey. He cannot stand this one.

Without comment or hesitation, he lifts the maiden upon his own little beast, and then mounts behind her. He fears the animal will not be able to bear up under the combined weight long; but something must be done; there is no time for consideration. The little black broncho does not seem to mind his burden at first, but strikes out in the same mad, swift gallop he has before kept up. But not many miles have been traveled before Bill detects signs of distress in the animal. At the same moment he hears cries of fiendish triumph behind him. The dead broncho has been discovered by the pursuers; they know that there is little chance of escape for these two with only one horse between them.

Suddenly, like an inspiration, comes to the brave detective the memory of a mass of rocks, which, if they can be reached, will serve as a fortress for himself and the fair one — a high, towering mass, which bears the name of the "Tower of the Sun," so straight up do they reach, so high are they. There is a path leading to the top, just wide enough for one horse and rider; and the detective knows that, if he can but reach the spot, he can hold his enemies at bay, and probably in some way escape them.

"It cannot be over five miles distant," he murmurs, and, looking about him to see if some familiar landmark is in sight to guide him, he turns his pony's head to the right; he recognizes his surroundings; he knows that the "Tower of the Sun" cannot be far off. Three miles are covered, the sound of the pursuers' voices and the dull thud of their ponies' hoofs gradually become more and more distinct; they are not far off.

"On, brave fellow," whispers Bill to his pony.

The little beast is panting, greatly distressed; he cannot possibly go much farther.

At last, with a cry of joy, the cowboy detective sees the "tower" looming up before him, not over one-half mile away; its top is reflected in the bright light of the moon, which casts a silvery radiance upon the grim, gray rocks. The girl is praying; the pony struggles on, he seems imbued with his master's spirit. The bandits are close upon them. Zip! a bullet whistles past their ears; then sounds the report.

"On, pony; but a little farther."

Gasping, groaning, trembling in every limb, the faithful animal reaches the foot of the "tower."

"Saved!" cries Bill, springing from his back, and raising the girl in his arms.

He hurries up the path leading to the top, the broncho following like a dog. He does not wish to leave his master, this faithful beast.

They make the top; the detective places his precious charge upon her feet, and at that moment the broncho staggers and falls exhausted, and the pursuers are at the foot of the tower. The path leading to the top is a narrow, precipitous one, and the detective knows that but one man at a time can ascend. He looks well to the cartridges in his weapons, and, with a grim compression of his lips, an ominous flash in his eye, he awaits the coming of the first.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE IN THE MOUNTAINS.

THE bandits halt at the foot of the "tower." Full well the wily Valdoso (who leads them) knows this spot. He knows that one man, well armed, can hold at bay a score or more, secure from harm, within the rocky fastnesses of this natural fortress.

Cursing, he dismounts, and begins to investigate the surroundings. He thinks that, perhaps, some other means can be adopted to secure his prey. Mordaunt approaches him.

"Why don't you follow on up the hill?" he asks.

The bandit turns upon him with a sneer.

"And be wiped out, one at a time? Mind your own affairs. I know what I am doing."

With an angry flush, the young villain stands back. His restless eye scrutinizes the band of bloodthirsty men who have accompanied him. Ah! he recognizes one of them. He sees the handsome boyish face of him whom he believes to be Hugh Daggett's son, the face of Alberto.

A grim smile comes to his lips. This man may be killed by a stray bullet this night. Who can tell?

He walks over to his pony, and absently watches Valdoso, as he creeps around the base of the tower in search of some means of ascent, not so dangerous as the path. He mutters, as he watches:

"Curse this long-haired cowboy, who has turned up to thwart me. He must not escape."

The bandit chief is thinking much in the same strain. His evil heart is bitter against the handsome detective, who, unarmed, has overpowered and bound him. When he recovers himself, he finds his wife apparently in a faint near him. With much difficulty he arouses her and bids her loose him. She does so, and, with a curse, he springs along the passage leading to Millicent's cave, only to find her gone and Mordaunt bound and blindfolded. He raves with passion when he sees this; shouts for one of his men; gives him orders, when he comes, to scour the cavern and surroundings for the fugitives. He knows they cannot be far away. And then, discovering their flight, himself leads the pursuit, accompanied by Mordaunt.

Now he is baffled again, for the time at least, and he mutters horrible curses as he hurries around the face of the "tower."

Ah, this detective has much to pay for. He has but little chance for mercy among these men. For an hour he searches, assisted by some of the band.

At last the young fellow, Alberto, hurries to him.

"I have found a way, Señor Capitan," he says.

An exclamation of joy from Valdoso.

"Where, now?" he demands.

The young bandit explains. There are a number of small trees growing along one side of the rocks; also bushes and vines. It is possible to creep from one to the other, and finally reach the top.

"By G–d! Alberto, you have a good head," cries the chief. "Suppose you try it."

The young fellow bows, and hurries to put his idea into execution. With difficulty he climbs up the side, pulling himself up by vines and bushes; but he is soon half way up.

"Up! follow him!" cries the chief to the others.

They spring forward to do his bidding, and soon a dark line of living, breathing, bloodthirsty demons are climbing up the precipitous side of the rocks.

Mordaunt has retired to the shadow of a clump of trees. He has his hand upon his revolver. He sees the bandits drawing nearer and nearer to the unsuspecting detective and his charges. Soon they will be down upon him. Ah! even as he looks, the head and shoulders of Mexican Bill appear above the top. He has seen the line of bandits; he is going to protect himself. He raises his revolver. "Bang!" and one of the attacking party falls, tumbling down the side. One of them, but not the foremost one, Alberto, is still unharmed. "Curse him! why could it not have been him!" This flashes through his mind. He must die! He raises his arm; the six-shooter glistens in the sunlight, as a few scattered rays break in through the trees.

"Bang," the report sounds out on the air, and Alberto comes trembling, falling, crashing, almost at his very feet. He feels a firm, strong hand grasp his wrist, hears a fierce demand.

"Why in h—l did you do that? He is one of my best men." It is Valdoso, and Valdoso with an unpleasant look in his eyes.

The young villain turns white, and moves uneasily.

"I fired at Mexican Bill. I shot too low," he mutters.

"You lie. D—n you! You hear? You lie! I have a mind to run my knife through your cowardly heart. You skunk! You thought that young Alberto was Hugh Daggett's son. I told you that to mislead you for a purpose of my own. You determined to put him out of the way. But, you white-livered, murdering dog, you have made a mistake. Alberto is *not* Hugh Daggett's son."

"My God! Is this true?" He staggers back.

"True? You can bet your worthless life on it. Do you see that long-haired man up there on the 'Tower,' that man we call Mexican Bill? Well, *he* is Hugh Daggett's son, and has in his possession this minute the proofs of his identity and of his father's death. They are in a tin box, which he stole from me after binding me. D——n him!"

With eyes nearly bursting from their sockets, Mordaunt Daggett hears these words. That man Hugh Daggett's son, and with the proofs in his possession? And more, with Millicent Daggett under his care! His head reels as the full force of this comes to him. Then he thinks how can he put this man out of the way, and obtain possession of those precious documents.

The voice of Valdoso sounds in his ears.

"So you see how you stand," he was saying.

"If that man gets away from here, you are thrown completely out of the race."

"He must not leave here alive."

"He won't if I can help it." And the bandit turns to go to the foot of the path leading to the top.

As he passes the corpse of young Alberto, he murmurs: "Poor boy! You were a better man than your cowardly murderer."

Mordaunt hears it.

"It was a mistake," he mutters. "*You* are to blame. You lied to me. You even said *you* were going to put him out of the way."

"Well, perhaps I did. Say no more about it."

The bandit speaks abruptly, savagely. Mordaunt keeps silent, and follows the chief.

He can see the bandits still creeping to the top, keeping behind jutting boulders and the trunks of the small trees as much as possible. They fear the pellets of the brave detective. They are now nearly all close together. They are going to make a solid, simultaneous attack upon the defender of innocence at the top.

Ah, they are upon him. The shots sound out upon the night. The good Winchester is doing noble work.

Valdoso utters a cry of triumph. "I have him now," he cries, and springs up the path, followed by Mordaunt.

The detective, fighting against great odds, does not see them, does not know that these two merciless ones are so near him — does not know until he hears a cry of terror from Millicent. He is struggling with a brawny Mexican as he hears the cry. Exerting all his strength, he pushes him over the edge, and turns to her. He sees the gleaming eyes of Valdoso, sees the slender figure of Mordaunt Daggett. They are nearly to the top. He throws himself flat upon his stomach, and raises the girl to the ledge of rock where he has been standing.

"Shoot into those hell-hounds!" he cries. "Keep them back! I will attend to these two."

With a white, scared face, the girl fires three shots into the clambering, surging mass, and Bill turns to those two who are bent upon his destruction; they have reached the top, and, with a groan, the detective sees Daggett seize the tin box.

Millicent had not brought it with her when he had raised her upon the plateau.

He must regain it; it is precious to him; he raises his rifle to shoot, when, like a flash, these words surged through his brain, "*You are Hugh Daggett's son; he is your cousin.*"

He lowers his rifle; he cannot kill his father's brother's son; but he will force it from him. Ah! Valdoso sees it in his hands; with a snarl, he snatches it from him.

"It is mine," Bill hears him say; the next moment he is struggling with the bandit. The terrible struggle of two desperate, maddened men.

Back and forth they writhe, each striving to secure the mastery over the other. Now the detective is on the bottom, but, by a mighty effort, he struggles to his feet. Breathlessly the young villain watches the contest, then, hearing the shots upon the plateau above, he looks up and sees the white-robed figure of Millicent Daggett keeping the bandit horde at bay. He springs to her side, fires two shots into their midst, and, seizing the screaming girl, leaps down from the plateau, and hurries down the path. Valdoso and the detective are still fiercely wrestling as he passes by. They have left the smooth, level, inclosed portion at the top, and the bandit is endeavoring to press the brave detective over the edge of the narrow path. If he succeeds in doing so, almost certain death awaits Mexican Bill at the bottom of the deep ravine which is below that position. The cowboy knows this; he fights with the desperation of death; he feels the tin box for which he is struggling tightly pressed against his breast; it is between them; he feels himself growing weaker; he looks up at the stars, sees them twinkling in the sky above him; then, clutching the bandit chief tightly with both arms, he falls backward, down, down, into the depths, carrying with him the bitter enemy who has tried to destroy him, the tin box that contains the proofs of his birth, of his very self.

They fall; just as the band of fierce outlaws appear upon the scene; just as Mordaunt Daggett reaches the foot of the tower.

He sees the terrible ending of the struggle, and, raising the unconscious form of his cousin upon the back of one of the ponies, he secures her so she cannot fall, and then, mounting another, he rides swiftly away in the night.

"All is over," he mutters. "I am victorious. They have both perished, and I am the sole heir to a princely fortune. Strange if I cannot manufacture proofs of Hugh Daggett's death, now that I know how it occurred, and there is no one left to contradict me. I will not allow *that* to stand in my way."

With demoniacal glee he chuckles to himself, and rides on, leading the other pony; rides until early morning light.

CHAPTER XV.

BARTHOLOMEW AND BASSETT.

THE day is fine; a gentle wind from the mountains serves to cool the hot air of September, which is unusually oppressive this year.

Two men are sitting upon the broad veranda of the Phœnix Hotel, at the celebrated hot springs, six miles from Las Vegas, New Mexico. They are old acquaintances. We have met them before. Bartholomew the portly, Bassett the diminutive.

"You certainly have a beautiful climate," the English lawyer remarks, looking about him contentedly, "your land is truly a paradise on earth."

The face of Bartholomew flushes with pleasure.

"It is generally conceded by all tourists and visitors to our country, that it is the grandest on earth. Think of it. We embrace in one land, under one government, the beauties of the tropics and the delights of the arctics; within a few days' ride, we can witness the remarkable extremes of all climates, show the most magnificent scenery, the most astounding natural curiosities, the remains of a people who have been among the most powerful of ancient times. Our land is a glorious one, a study for the ethnologist, the geologist, the philologist, and even the theologist. I sometimes wonder at our people traveling all over Europe, Asia and other continents, in search of wonders, when their own land is so much superior to them all, has so much of interest."

He speaks warmly. He loves his country. Bassett smiles. He makes no reply to his enthusiastic friend.

"Strange we have not heard from your cowboy detective," he says, to change the subject.

"It *is* singular," remarks the other, contracting his brows. "But depend on it; he is at work. He may be in a section where the postal and telegraphic service is deficient; he has not had an opportunity of communicating with us; depend upon it. I have the utmost faith in his ability, and feel confident that he will unravel the mystery."

"I hope so," thoughtfully. "Let me see: it was from Las Vegas that I received the communication from Pietro Alvarez. He is buried there?"

"I believe so."

"Has he any friends or relatives living there?"

"Really, I cannot say positively. I heard of his death from a Mexican during my researches. He was known well."

The little Englishman relapses into deep thought.

"Suppose we investigate the matter," he says, at last. "There may be some one who knew him during his early life. We may gain some information. The distance from this place is not great, only a matter of six miles; we can easily ride in and pursue our inquiries."

"A good idea," cries Bartholomew. "It is early. We can go to-day."

The Englishman rises to his feet.

"We will," he says, and they enter the hotel to make arrangements for ponies to bear them to Las Vegas. It does not take long to equip the animals, and in an hour the two lawyers are riding leisurely along toward Las Vegas. They reach their destination within an hour and a half, and Bartholomew draws rein before a low adobe building, in front of which are gathered a motley assemblage of Mexicans, cowboys and a few Indians.

The general appearance of the place suggests its character — that of a drinking place — and Bassett whispers to his companion as they dismount:

"Why do you stop here?"

"The fellow who keeps this place knows every one within fifty miles. He can give us some information if he is worked right."

"Oh!" The Englishman understands. They enter the low building, leaving their quadrupeds in charge of a cowboy, who volunteers his services.

The English lawyer looks curiously about him as they enter. The room is a long one, but narrow. A bar of solid oak extends nearly the full length of the room, a portion of which is covered with bottles of various liquors and boxes of cigars. The walls are decorated with highly colored paintings of questionable subjects — "Venus at the Bath," "A Spanish Lady," and others. There is a liberal use of vermilion and chrome in the painting of the woodwork of the doors, windows and walls, and, altogether, the effect is decidedly gaudy and flashy.

A middle-aged man, in a flannel shirt fastened at the throat with an enormous diamond pin, a pair of velvet breeches, and a wide sash of many colors, looks up as they enter.

Bartholomew approaches him. "A little good rye whisky," he says, smiling conciliatorily; "which will you have?" he asks, turning to Bassett.

"A little sherry wine," answers that gentleman.

The proprietor or bar-tender grins somewhat contemptuously.

"D—d weak drink," he says. But he sets out the two bottles, and Bassett swallows the so-called "sherry" with a grimace. It seems to him a mixture of very inferior whisky and kerosene oil. Bartholomew controlled his features after drinking. The "good" rye is execrable. "Powdered glass and turpentine," he thinks. He pays the amount due, and then glances about the place.

"Nice place you have," he remarks.

"You can bet your boots it is," answers the proprietor. "I hev a d——d good trade heah. It's got to be nice to pull 'em."

"So, I suppose you are well acquainted about these parts. Been here a long time?" smiling.

"I run the first joint thet opened out heah. An, I reckon I run the best one now. Good rum, fancy joint, all the boys deal heah."

"Yes; your liquor is very good." Bassett smiles; he cannot help it. If this is the best, the Lord help the worst.

"Did you ever know a man by the name of Alvarez?" inquires Bartholomew, casually.

"Pete Alvarez? Wal, I should say so. He's croaked, you know. D——d good thing too; a dirty greaser, a chronic lush; he give me a heap of trouble;" and the dark face of the man grows savage at the recollection. "But I managed him," he adds. "I know how to run them jays."

"I suppose so," and Bartholomew looks at the fellow with an air of assumed admiration. "I suppose it requires a *smart* man like *yourself*, to handle these Mexicans?"

"Yes, and yer kin bet yer sweet life, I knows how to do it. They can't play any monkey business with me," drawing himself erect.

"Alvarez lived near here, I have have been told?"

"Yes, 'bout a mile out; lived with a pal, another greaser."

"Does *he* live there yet?"

"No; d——n it! I told yer Alvarez was croaked."

"You don't understand me. Does his '*pal*,' as you term him, live there yet?"

"Oh, yes; Dirty Antonio, we call him. He's there yet."

"About a mile from here, you say?"

The bar-tender leans upon the bar.

"Say, what do you fellers want of him? You're askin' a heap of questions." His tone is a mixture of curiosity and caution.

The lawyer rubs his fat hands together, and assumes an air of confidence. He lowers his voice.

"I don't mind telling *you*," he says, confidentially. "*You* are a smart fellow, and can keep a secret. The fact is, there is a little money coming to Alvarez from a relative who died not long ago, and I, being a lawyer, am in search of him."

"Oh, yer a lawyer? Suppos'n Pete didn't leave his stuff to any one, who gits the dust?"

"It is more than likely that Alvarez *did* leave his goods and chattels to his partner, and it is possible that *he* can lay claim to this money."

The fellow bursts into a hoarse laugh.

"Him! Dirty Antonio a millionaire! By G——d! he'll blow it all in. He won't have a nickel in a month."

"I did not say there was that much money left Alvarez, nor that his partner was entitled to it. I merely thought it likely. If he spends his money, so much the better for you; so much more to your interest to help me."

The wily lawyer sees he has adopted the right plan, for the fellow sobers down, and says:

"I'm willin' to help you. I didn't say I wasn't. I only laughed at the idea. If Antonio gets the dust, I'll get some of it, yer kin bet."

"Well, how can we find our way there?"

"*He'll* show ye. He's outside now."

"Ah; that's good. Suppose you call him in, without telling him what we want him for. We can then have a talk with him, and go to his house."

"I'll do it."

He goes to the door, and speaks a few words to a filthy, greasy, bearded fellow outside.

The fellow turns, and follows him in.

Both Bartholomew and Bassett turn in repugnance as they behold the filthy object before them; but they overcome the feeling, and Bartholomew even shakes hands with him, and invites him to drink.

The Mexican, who has been properly named "Dirty Antonio," swallows a brimming glass of the foul mixture designated as "good rye" by the proprietor, and then says, brokenly:

"Yuia wanta mea. Whata you want?"

His voice is husky; his tone sullen.

Bartholomew lowers his voice.

"We wish to talk to you on a matter of importance. There may be money in it for you."

At the word money, the fellow's eyes glisten with an unholy fire.

"Money!" he gasps. "Goa, speak!"

"Not here," whispers Bartholomew. "It must be in private — at your home."

The fellow looks suspiciously upon the smiling stranger.

"Whena youa paya de money?" he says.

"Don't you be alarmed," answers Bartholomew. "You *may* be richer before many *hours*."

"You gota de money wid you?"

"Perhaps; come! I have not much time. Will you hear what I have to say, or not?"

The fellow averts his evil eyes.

"Comea," he says. "Youa follow me. I go ahead. Come."

He hurries from the place.

"Don't trust that greaser too far," says the dispenser of liquid fire, as the two lawyers leave the place. "He's a bad man. He is mighty slick with a 'bowie.'"

Bartholomew smiled.

"Thank you," he says. "I am not afraid. Besides, I have a Smith & Wesson," and he opens the door.

Bassett is not so complacent. He does not understand the rough characters of the frontier as well as his *confrère*, but he follows him without a word.

The Mexican is slouching along the road as they mount their ponies. Throwing a gold-piece to the cowboy, and telling him to treat the crowd of loungers, Bartholomew chirrups to his broncho and starts after Antonio, Bassett, with difficulty, keeping pace with him. The Mexican is a rapid walker, and in ten minutes stops before a dirty cabin of mud and logs. He waits until the lawyers are before the door, and then, throwing it open, enters with the words:

"Comea inside."

They dismount, secure their ponies, and enter the hut.

CHAPTER XVI.

DIRTY ANTONIO'S TREACHERY.

AS THEY enter, Bartholomew slips his revolver from his hip pocket into the side pocket of his sack coat. He wants to have it handy in case of emergency.

The interior is quite dark, coming in out of the bright sunlight, and it takes some little time for the eyes to become accustomed to the gloom. Bassett stands blinking like an owl, behind the portly form of Bartholomew, who closes his eyes for a moment the better to accommodate them to the semi-darkness.

" Sita down," they hear the Mexican say, and, being now able to take in the surrounding objects, they do so.

The interior of dirty Antonio's residence was not at all prepossessing, although it seemed befitting him who dwelled therein. Dirty, filthy, with no floor, and but little furniture, it looked more like a den than a dwelling-place of a human being.

They see the Mexican squatting on the earth before them.

" You wanta to seea me; I ama waiting," he mutters.

Bartholomew hesitates a moment. He does not know the best way to begin.

"Get through with this as soon as possible," whispered Bassett; "this place is stifling."

"You were Pietro Alvarez's partner," the lawyer begins.

The Mexican starts.

"What of it," he grunts.

"Were you his partner?"

"Youa know it, I say, yes."

"How long had you known him before his death?"

"Some years; mebbe ten, mebbe twenty." He speaks sullenly; the lawyer observes it.

"See here, my man!" he cries; "you want money; I have some for you; but you must answer my questions to get it. You need not be afraid; I am not going to harm you. I know that Alvarez was a bandit, a robber; I should not wonder if you had been one yourself, but that has nothing to do with *me*. All I want to know is, how long have you known Alvarez, and whether he shared his secrets with you, as well as his dwelling-place."

The Mexican is staring steadily at him as he speaks. He is evidently impressed by his manner; but he is cunning. He speaks.

"You knowa he a bandit. Well, I say, I too a bandit wid him; I knewa him thirty, mebbe forty year; I no stop to think. I knowa some secret. Whata you want to know?"

The lawyer determined to speak boldly; this fellow may know what Alvarez had to impart upon his death; so he says:

"Do you know that Alvarez wrote a letter to England some few years ago?"

The Mexican starts; his eyes gleam.

"Yes; Ia know."

"Do you know *why* he wrote that letter?"

"Ia know."

"Ah, you do? You know the papers had an advertisement for information of a man who had disappeared, and that Alvarez answered it?"

"Yes; I knowa it all."

"Then you can obtain a large sum of money by telling what you know."

"Youa paya me some now, before I say?"

Bartholomew quickly takes his wallet from his pocket.

It is well filled.

The eyes of the Mexican glisten as he sees it.

Bartholomew removes two notes for one hundred dollars each, and holds them up before the fellow's eyes.

"I will give you these to start in," he says. "More will follow."

He replaces the wallet while he is speaking, the eyes of the ex-bandit following the movement.

"You givea me dat?" he mutters.

"Yes." The Mexican thinks.

"De paper wanta to know about a man called Daggett?" he says.

"Yes."

"Daggett — hea dead."

"Dead! How did he die?"

"Alvarez, hea killa him."

"Ah, killed him for money, eh?"

"He killa him for money."

"Mexican Bill was right," murmurs Bassett.

"Yes," replies Bartholomew, in an undertone. Then to the Mexican: "How do you know this?"

"Ia seea him die. Him anoder man—a Pietro Daniel."

"By Jehoshaphat, he *must* know," cries Bartholomew. "How can you prove this?"

"Ia prove. Givea me de money."

Bartholomew hands him the bills, and says: "Now produce your proofs, and you shall have more."

"I noa keepa de proofs here. Youa comea to-night—comea at ten. I showa you de proofs, an' you givea me de money."

"You will be sure to produce them at ten to-night," Bassett asks, suspiciously.

The Mexican shrugs his shoulders. "You noa want dem, you noa come."

"We will be here," answers Bartholomew, "at ten to-night," and they leave the house. The Mexican watches them as they mount, and then turns, with an evil look in his eye, and re-enters the house.

"This fellow knows it all, depend upon it," remarks Bartholomew, as they ride along, "and, to-night we will have the proofs. I wish I had thought of this before; it would have been unnecessary to have engaged the detective. I wonder how *he* is progressing, and what he has learned."

"Do you think you can trust this Mexican?" asks Bassett. "He looks like a desperate scoundrel; one that would not hesitate at crime of any sort."

Bartholomew laughs, a merry laugh, that shakes his portly form. "We need not fear him," he cries. "One good man is more than his equal in a test of strength; besides, I am armed."

They ride along in silence after this, and halt before an hotel, where they have supper, and wait until the hour of the appointment.

At quarter of ten they mount their ponies to return to the Mexican's cabin. The night is dark, lighted only by the stars. Bartholomew has his pistol handy, and they ride along in silence.

The low hut soon looms up before them; and they dismount, and make ready to enter, when, suddenly, without warning, they are seized from behind, and are borne to the earth.

So sudden has been the attack that Bartholomew has not had an opportunity to draw his revolver. He struggles desperately, but his assailant has him by the throat, and is strangling him.

Bassett is in the same condition, and it appears as if it were all up for the two lawyers.

Suddenly upon the night air comes the sound of horses' hoofs, and the next moment the report of a rifle rings out.

The scoundrels, with a muttered curse, relax their grasp upon the throats of their intended victim, and hurry away in the darkness.

"Hello! What's the trouble?" a cheery voice sounds; and the lawyers, looking up, see a young man clad in cowboy costume, mounted upon a wiry little broncho, standing but a few feet from them.

Bassett arises to his feet, and brushes the dust and dirt from his clothing, while his companion mutters:

"Terrible enough. If you had not come upon the scene just when you did, the world would have been the poorer by the loss of two lawyers; eh, Bassett?"

The cowboy laughs.

"Perhaps the world would not look at it in that light," he says.

"Perhaps not," mutters Bartholomew, arranging his clothing.

"Two lawyers," remarks the cowboy. "Did I understand you to say that one of your names is Bassett?"

"I did not *say* so," answers the portly gentleman. "I merely addressed my companion."

"Is his name Bassett?"

"Yes, sir; Isaac Bassett, at your service; and I wish to tender you my sincere thanks for your timely assistance."

"Don't mention it," remarks the man; "for I think I am in luck in finding you. I am looking for a lawyer from England by the name of Isaac Bassett, and, I take it, you are the man."

The little lawyer approaches him.

"Looking for me?" he cries. "What do you want of me."

"Gentleman by the name of Daggett — Arthur

Daggett — sent me. I have been to Santa Fé, and was on my way to Las Vegas, when I came upon you."

Both legal gentlemen give utterances to exclamations of astonishment.

" Arthur Daggett in America!" cries Bassett. " I cannot believe it."

" Decidedly mysterious," remarks Bartholomew.

" Well, we ain't got much time to fool away," cries the cowboy. " Here, read this, and then come with me."

He hands a folded paper to Bassett, who strikes a match and reads it. There are but a few words; but they arouse the little lawyer at once:

" BASSETT — Accompany this man at once. He will lead you to me. I am in grievous trouble.
" ARTHUR DAGGETT."

" I will go with you," he says, " but must first return these ponies to their owner, and secure others."

They mount hurriedly, and ride into Las Vegas. The proprietor of the hotel where they have eaten supper agrees to return the ponies to the Phœnix Hotel, at the Hot Springs, and also has some bronchos which he will sell. They conclude the bargain, and, without rest, follow the cowboy.

All night they travel. At daybreak they halt for refreshment, and then continue their journey.

At noon they rest for a few hours. Their ponies are distressed, and there is yet some distance to go. About four they resume the tedious, tiring ride, and the sun is setting as they come in sight of the timber *motté*, where Arthur Daggett is encamped. Suddenly, sweeping across the prairie, they see a body of mounted men. The cowboy, shading his eyes with one hand, utters a cry:

"What is it?" asks Bartholomew.

"Valdoso's gang, for a hundred," the man answers. "And they are heading for the camp. They will be there in an hour. Put spurs to your horse and follow me. We must be there first."

With a feeling of sickening horror, the English lawyer sees the ruthless riders swooping down upon the timber, and, urging on his pony, he follows the cowboy and Bartholomew, who are already some distance in advance.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAVED FROM DEATH.

WITH a dazed feeling, a sensation as of having been beaten all over, so sore is his entire body, Mexican Bill recovers consciousness, recovers, and with difficulty raises himself upon his elbow, and looks about him. At first he does not understand why he is here, or how he came; then memory assumes her dominion, and it all comes to him; the battle on the tower, his desperate struggle with Valdoso. He can see by the faint light which is breaking (for day is dawning) that he is lying at the bottom of a narrow ravine, merely a wedge-shaped cleft in the rocks. As he lies he can trace the walls on either side, and, looking up at the patch of gray sky above him, he begins wondering how he can ever escape. Then he begins to conjecture why he was not instantly killed. The fall is a terrific one, at least one hundred and fifty feet, and the bottom of the ravine is of solid rock.

He struggles to his feet, finding that he can do so without much trouble; for, with the exception of the sore, stiff feelings, he is uninjured. Then he starts back in horror and amazement; he understands why he has not been crushed; for, in rising, he sees the mangled form of Juan Valdoso, the bandit king, immediately beneath him. *He has been lying upon it.* The bandit has struck the ground first, and he has fallen upon him, thus breaking his fall, and saving his life. With trembling lips he offers a prayer to Heaven. His life has been miraculously saved; he examines the body of Valdoso; he is quite dead. He drops the pulseless wrist, and then looks for the tin box which he remembers has fallen with them. He finds it lying near by, uninjured save for a few scratches.

It is now quite light. He must devise some plan of release from this place. He looks up the steep walls; he sees that there are a number of stout shrubs and small bushes growing along the sides, also some trailing vines. But he hesitates before attempting to make use of them; not but what he believes them strong enough to bear him, but rather that he fears *he* will not be strong enough to clamber to the top, so far up.

But something must be done. He cannot remain here with the ghastly corpse of the bandit. He must not give up. So, with determination, he braces his feet against one wall, and pulls himself up a short distance by a vine which grows to the rock on the other. He has fastened the box to his belt, and, thankful that its contents are in his possession, works away.

And it *is* work. He is obliged to go slowly, carefully testing the strength of the vines and bushes before intrusting his weight to them. But he is making good headway. In two hours he is near the top, and stops to rest, bracing himself against the side of the walls. In an hour he begins the tedious toiling again. He is within three feet of the top, stretches out one hand to grasp a projecting ledge of rock, when, to his horror, he feels the bush, at whose roots his feet are pressing, gradually give way. He utters an involuntary cry; he believes he must perish; but at that moment a warm hand grasps his own (the one clutching the ledge), a voice cries: " Spring forward, and grasp the top." He does so, and is held by the wrist by some one above, some one who holds him securely by the wrist. He makes desperate efforts to reach the top, and finally does so, is pulled over the edge, and falls exhausted upon the level ground at the top of the tower. For fully five minutes he lies with his eyes closed, panting for breath; then he opens them, and looks about him — looks for his preserver.

He sees a figure clad in black velvet. The figure of a man apparently; but, as the object of his scrutiny turns, he recognizes the sad, beautiful face of Pepita, Valdoso's wife.

"You here!" he gasps.

"Do not disturb yourself," she murmurs, coming toward him. "You will need all your strength."

"You have saved my life," he utters, in amazement.

"I came to save you," she replies.

"How did you know I was here?"

He is amazed that this woman should possess the strength she had shown in raising him over the edge of the precipice. He is astonished that she should be here and clothed in male costume, here to save him.

"You are my guardian angel," he murmurs, thankfully.

"It is but right I should be," she answers, significantly. He hears her words, but attaches no significance to them. "How did you know I was here?" he repeats.

"The men upon their return told me that both you and Juan had gone over the precipice, that you were both killed."

"I thought perhaps *one* of you might escape. I knew both of you could not. I came to see if such was the case."

"You came in time. In five minutes I would have fallen."

"I saw your hand clutching the ledge of rocks. I seized it, and pulled you out."

He rises, and takes her hand, pressing it to his lips. He feels her tremble.

"And Juan," she falters.

"He is a mangled corpse, at the bottom of the ravine," he answers. She shudders, then weeps.

"God forgive him," she sobs, "I loved him, in spite of all. Perhaps it is best that he is gone."

"There is no doubt of it," replies Bill, firmly. "Best for you, best for the community at large."

She makes no reply, only sobs gently, mourning the wretch she has loved. Suddenly she raises her head.

"And the girl," she cries, "Where is she?"

"In the power of her villainous cousin," the detective answers.

"We must be after them!" exclaims the woman, rising to her feet. "He must not escape."

The detective sighs.

"I could have prevented him ever leaving this place alive," he murmurs: "but I spared him; he is my cousin; I could not shoot him down in cold blood."

"And that is why you spared him?" she asks.

"Yes," dejectedly.

"And you will allow him to pursue his path of villainy, without seeking to check him."

"No; I shall start in pursuit of him as soon as I am sufficiently recovered; I shall wrest that fair girl from him, and bid him go."

"He would not thus spare you."

"Perhaps not; but think! All these years I have never known one of kindred; I cannot willfully kill one, even though that one should be a villain, a conscienceless scoundrel."

An expression of great emotion crosses the woman's features; her lips move; she nearly speaks, but checks herself.

“So be it,” she murmurs at last, and turns away.

He is soon himself once more; and, going to her, tells her so.

“Then, we will go,” she says.

“We have much to do. I will accompany you, first to the camp of Arthur Daggett, to try and save him from the hands of Valdoso's fiends. They will obey me, and we may be in time. They will not ride fast during the heat of the day, and, by pressing forward, we may be able to reach there before them. Then we will search for the girl. We may not be obliged to do so, for the young man may head for the camp. I hope it may be so. Come.”

She has assumed the command, and, without comment, he obeys. They mount, and ride in the direction of the rising sun. She has brought ponies with her, three of them, and she leads the other, holding the rein with one hand, guiding her own with the other. She rides like a man, and the detective admires the graceful carriage of this brave woman as she rides by his side.

They do not spare the little beasts, and toward nightfall they behold a band of mounted men some miles before them.

“They are before us,” she murmurs. “We must hasten, or we will be too late.”

The detective knows what this means — death to the little party encamped in the timber. They stand little or no chance of escape from the bloodthirsty wretches who are surging toward them. They put spurs to their ponies, these two — the beautiful woman and the gallant cowboy — and, despite the fact that the little beasts have been traveling hard all day, they answer to the vigorous impulse, and dash forward over the plain. With eager, trained eyes these two see the body of bandits gradually growing nearer the timber. They will be too late, no matter how hard they try, and a groan bursts from the lips of the detective as he realizes the fact. But they will keep on, never relaxing the terrific speed of their ponies. Suddenly the animal Pepita is riding stumbles and falls. As quick as thought she is upon the back of the spare pony, and is after Bill, who has forged ahead, and is reining in his pony to return to her assistance.

"Good," he shouts; "you are a remarkable woman. I doubt if I could have done that myself."

She makes no reply, only blushes, and they leave the faithful little beast which has fallen to die upon the prairie, while they hurry on to save the precious lives of Arthur Daggett and his little party.

The bandits have reached the timber. Night has fallen upon the plain. They hear the sound of rifle and revolver, carried to them on the gentle breezes.

"Too late, too late!" groans Mexican Bill.

"God help them!" murmurs the woman; and

the anguish in her gentle voice strikes upon the detective's heart.

Hark! What is that?

The sound of many horses sweeping over the prairie. A series of ringing cheers. Not of Valdoso's band, but of another braver, nobler body. His own bold men.

They are coming toward them. They will soon be there.

With a loud cry, the detective spurs on his pony to meet them; but the animal is exhausted, and, with a gasp, staggers and falls, carrying the cowboy with him. A cry of pain, the feeling of a heavy weight crushing him down, and Mexican Bill becomes unconscious. His pony has fallen upon him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REPULSE OF THE BANDITS.

"ON to the camp!" shouts the cowboy, who is directing Bartholomew and Bassett to these gentlemen. "As our visit will be made to a gang of cutthroats and a pile of dead bodies, they must not surprise the boys."

The race is a friendly contested one; but the trio are in time. They dash into the timber, the guide giving vent to a yell that brings a score of his fellows to his side.

"Valdoso's gang," he shouts, "on the prairie. Be here in five minutes."

"Valdoso." The hated name bursts from the lips of these brave fellows, in an ominous murmur, a murmur like the angry roar of the surf upon the shore. Then they hurry to their arms, and see to their ponies, while the lawyers are conducted to the wagon, where Arthur Daggett is reclining.

The cowboys are ready.

The messenger sent in advance by Valdoso has not made his appearance from some cause, and the cowboys are in camp.

"Mr. Daggett," cries the young fellow who has conducted the lawyers to the camp. A noise is heard inside the wagon, and the face of Arthur Daggett, looking older and more worn than what we last saw him, appears at the opening.

"What is it," he demands, then sees the lawyer. "Bassett," he cries, reaching out his hand.

"I came as soon as your message reached me," says Bassett. "But for what in the name of common sense are you doing here?" he continues, in amazement. The stricken old man passes his hand to his brow.

"It is a long story," he says. "Oh, Bassett! I have been sorely afflicted. Millicent, my darling child"—and he sobs. "What of her? Is *she* with you?" the lawyer asks eagerly, wonderingly.

"She *was*, Bassett. But, oh God! she is in the power of a fiend in human form — Valdoso the bandit."

"Crack! whizz! bang!" the fire-arms sound out.

Bartholomew jumps behind the wagon.

Arthur Daggett's pale face grows whiter.

"They are returning to pay you another visit," cries Bassett.

"Who? Valdoso?" and the old gentleman shudders.

"Yes; Valdoso. Lie low in the body of the wagon."

Bartholomew gives this last piece of advice, and sets the example by springing into the vehicle, and pulls Daggett from the opening. Bassett follows. The sight of the furious battle which is now raging, appalls him. He is not accustomed to scenes of bloodshed.

Arthur Daggett is trembling in every muscle.

"Oh, if my child is only safe!" he cries.

Bassett, his mind occupied with feelings of curiosity and fear, makes no reply. Bartholomew is lying perfectly quiet, his keen eye watching the entrance, his hand clutching his Smith and Wesson.

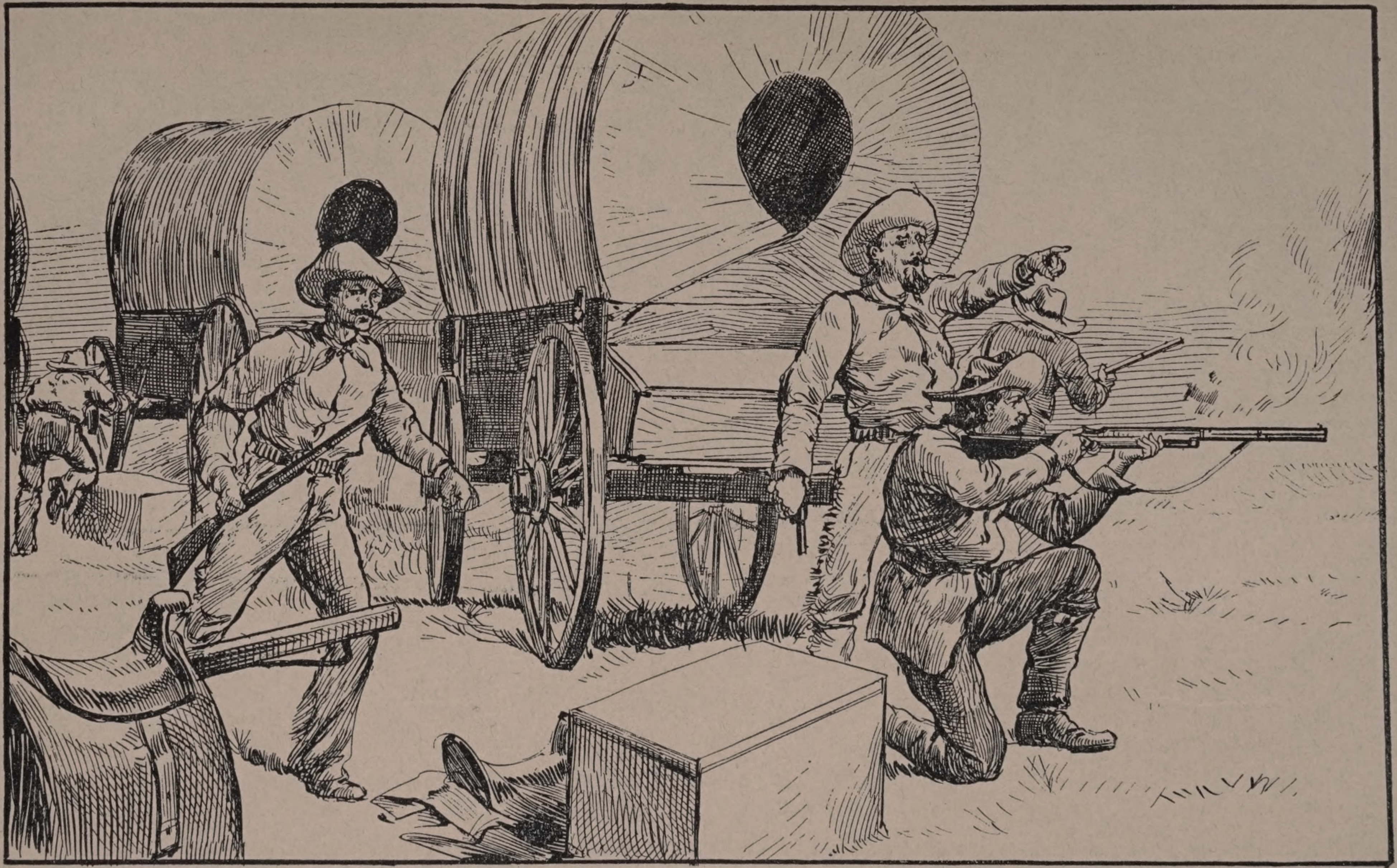
The yells of the discomfited bandits, who have reckoned upon an easy victory, are appalling, and the cheery shouts of the brave cowboys, rising clear above them, together with the reports of the rifles and revolvers, serve to make up a scene of pandemonium seldom witnessed.

Zip! A bullet whistles through the canvas top, and the three men crouch lower.

Thud! Another strikes the body of the wagon, but does not come through. It is heavily built.

"By Jehoshaphat! They're hard at it," mutters Bartholomew.

Now the cries of the cowboys sound triumphant, and the noise of conflict grows fainter. The sound



The Battle between Cowboys and Bandits.

MEXICAN BILL—Page 160.

of horses' feet, disappearing in the distance, informs the men in the wagon that the bandits have been driven off, and they emerge from their place of security.

Both Daggett and the English lawyer draw back in horror as, in the light of the camp fire, they see the fearful sight before them — men, horses, bleeding, dying, dead, around them. Bartholomew looks at the ravages of war without comment; he steps over the dead bodies unceremoniously.

" This is a horrible country," murmurs Daggett. " My God! can men be such fiends? "

Old Buckskin Ben approaches him, wiping his bowie-knife upon his sleeve.

" We hev druv 'em off," he cries, with a grim smile; " leastways, some on 'em. Some on 'em are left to feed the vultures."

" And Mexican Bill's band, where are they?" asks Daggett, anxiously.

" Gone to chase 'em out of sight; kill the rest if posserble."

" I hope they will not leave us unprotected any longer than they can help." The old man is fearful.

" Don't you feel skeered, boss," old Ben assures him. " Thar ain't none of 'em left to hurt ye. The boys'll be back soon." And calmly he turns to the teamsters and gives orders to complete the arrangements for supper, which have been interrupted by the advent of the bandits.

Bassett feels easy in his mind now, and introduces Bartholomew to Arthur Daggett.

I heard you speak of Mexican Bill's band," says the portly lawyer, the introduction being over. "Are *they* here?"

"Yes;" and briefly the old gentleman relates the timely arrival of the brave cowboy detective and his men.

They have reached the fire, and, sitting beside it, Bassett again broaches the subject, as to the presence of the Englishman and his daughter in America. Hurriedly Arthur Daggett relates the circumstances, and the lawyers listen eagerly.

"And Mordaunt, where is he?" asks Bartholomew, after he has finished.

"He left me the night after Mexican Bill had gone to rescue Millicent. He said he was not easy in his mind, and could not rest until she was found; so left me, to search for her."

"Hum," mutters Bartholomew.

Bassett remains silent. He is thinking. It all seems strange to him. Singular that Mordaunt should insist upon coming to the country, and without informing him of the fact.

"Do you remember what Mexican Bill said, the first time you saw him?" asks Bartholomew, suddenly.

"What? what have you reference to?" asks Bassett, arousing himself.

"The fact that Mordaunt Daggett would be the sole heir in case of the death of the remaining ones."

"What has that to do with what we have heard?" and the English lawyer looks warningly at his *confrère*, as he sees Arthur Daggett looking with surprise upon him.

"Perhaps nothing; only I was thinking of it. Putting this and that together, as my friend Bill does, it came to me, as I heard Mr. Daggett speaking."

The old gentleman arose to his feet, his pale face horrified, his eyes shifting uneasily.

"You don't think my nephew guilty of plotting for my death!" he cries.

Bartholomew feels discomfited. He has not intended to hurt the old man's feelings.

"I did not *say* that," he answers, in a low tone; "I should not like to accuse the young fellow."

"He is the soul of honor," cries the uncle. "His distress, when Millicent was found missing, was heart-rending. He *could* not be guilty of plotting for my death."

"I hope not; still, the temptation is great," he speaks boldly. The old man sits upon a stump near by, and, turning his back to the lawyers, allows his gray head to fall forward in his hands. They can see he is weeping.

"My God!" they hear him murmur; "if this should be true, I would pray Heaven to remove me from earth."

They walk away from the grief-stricken man. A sudden crash in the undergrowth around the camp, causes them to stop. Some one is breaking through. Who?

They wait; the next instant a man with torn clothing, hatless, with a wild, haggard face, forces his way through the low brush, and stands before them.

With a gasp, Bassett clutches the arm of his companion.

"Mordaunt Daggett," he cries. The newcomer starts, and then springs toward them.

"Bassett!" he mutters, hoarsely; "what are you doing here?"

"Your uncle sent for me; I have come to him."

"My uncle? Yes. Oh, I see. He found out where you were."

He speaks wildly, and the next moment turns from them and hurries to the fire — they follow him; they see Arthur Daggett rise as he hears some one approach him; they see him turn and look upon his nephew; they hear Mordaunt Daggett stagger and cry aloud, "My God! *You* living?" and crouch from him as though struck a blow.

"Yes, Mordaunt, I am living. Did you hope to find me dead?" The words came slowly, reproachfully. The young man straightens up.

"No, no!" he cries, nervously. "I feared it; I — feared you might not be able to defend yourself against the — a — bandits. I thought ——"

"How did you know the camp was to be attacked by bandits?" the old man speaks sternly.

The young villain grows livid, his eyes shifting.

"I — have been to their stronghold; I — was — captured; I heard their plot — their plan to attack you; see — my clothing torn — nearly dead, I —

escaped them; I hurried here to give you warning."

The lawyers hear every word. So interested are they that they do not hear the sound of the returning cowboys.

"Is this the truth?" demands Arthur Daggett.

"Truth? Why, yes. Why should I lie? Why ——"

"Except to benefit yourself," answers the old man.

The nephew lowers his head. "Benefit myself!" and he attempts to laugh; a laugh pitiful in its wavering tones. "No. I have been seeking to find Millicent; Millicent, whom I love. I have braved death to bring her to you."

At the name of his loved one the old man groans, his aged face raised to the sky. "My daughter!" His lips form the words. Then, eagerly, anxiously: "You have found her? You have brought her to me?"

The scoundrel hesitates; hesitates because he is about to strike a cowardly blow.

"No," he mutters. "She is dead."

"Dead! Oh, Father in Heaven."

The portly lawyer springs forward in time to save the stricken man from falling headlong into the fire, for he has lost consciousness.

Bassett seizes Mordaunt by the wrist, and turns him suddenly around, so he can look in his face. "Is this true," he demands, sternly.

"Of course it's true. I say Millicent Daggett is dead."

"And I say you lie," rings out a clear voice behind them.

Turning, they start in amazement — the lawyer, with a cry of joy; the young villain, with one of fear.

"Mexican Bill?" he gasps.

"Yes, Mexican Bill, who says you lie. Millicent Daggett is *not* dead — you know where she is — I demand her of you. Where is Millicent Daggett?"

The dark eyes of the handsome detective glower and burn as they strive to pierce the soul of the cowering wretch before him. Mordaunt Daggett averts his face. He cannot look into their burning depths.

"Speak! I am waiting."

With a sullen murmur, the villain answers:

"You say she is not dead; you should know where she is. Find her."

With a cry of rage, the cowboy springs upon him. With one hand he seizes him by the collar, and hisses into his ear:

"You despicable scoundrel! you white-livered dog! you are not fit to live. Yet, I cannot kill you; *you* know why. I am going to seek her; I shall do as you have said. *I shall find her.* I shall bring her to you face to face, and she shall condemn you."

He turns to his men.

"Guard well this man. Bind him; watch him; keep him until I return. You, Ned, come with me; I may need your assistance."

A white, beautiful face looks into his. The face of a woman—Pepita.

"But you are suffering pain," she cries. "Your arm is broken. You had better wait."

"I feel no pain, save that of a heavy heart. Time is precious; I cannot wait. Here, Ben! bind up my arm; you can doctor me up upon my return."

The cowboys lead away the trembling villain, and Buckskin Ben bandages the helpless arm of the detective. He is skillful, this old scout, and arranges the bandages rapidly and securely.

Then, with a face set and determined, with a heart eager and wistful, Mexican Bill mounts a fresh pony, and rides out upon the prairie?

CHAPTER XIX.

MILLICENT'S PERIL.

On through the night Mordaunt Daggett pursues his way through the scattering forest. The beautiful girl is still unconscious, although the rough movement of the pony is enough to arouse her, but the shock has been a great one, and, being weak and terrified from the events of the past three days, nature succumbs entirely to this last blow.

The young villain, leading her pony, casts a glance at her still white face ever and anon, occasionally pressing his finger to her wrist to assure himself that the feeble pulse is still beating, that life still exists in the unconscious one.

At daybreak he halts. He has no food for either himself and captives or the ponies; but game is plentiful; he has hopes of being able to bring down a squirrel or rabbit with his revolver. He knows the ponies can subsist on the luxuriant grass. He draws rein beneath a clump of trees which border a running stream, and relieves the pony of his beautiful burden. Then attaching the long lariats which are dangling from the saddles to the necks of the ponies, securing the other end to one of the trees, he leaves the girl and sets out to procure food, if possible. The sun is shining brightly when, with a deep sigh, Millicent recovers consciousness. She sits up, and looks about her in bewilderment; she is alone, no one in sight, no living creature, save the ponies, which are grazing at the end of their lariats; she rises to her feet.

"Am I alone?" she murmurs. She sees the two ponies; she remembers, with a sharp pang, the events of the previous night. As there are two ponies, there must be two riders. She is one; her despicable cousin must be the other; but where can he be? She suddenly realizes that her mouth and throat are dry and parched; she is suffering terribly with thirst. To her ears comes the musical murmuring of the stream near by, and she hurries to it, and, using her white hands as a mode of conveying the cool, refreshing liquid to her mouth, drinks her fill; she turns to return to the spot under the trees, when she sees Mordaunt coming toward her, his face dark and gloomy.

She shrinks from him as he draws nearer.

" So you've come around," he mutters, as he sees her. " I thought you were dead for a while."

" It would, perhaps, be better for me if I were," she murmurs.

" Nonsense; although the chances are we will both be dead unless I can find something to sustain life. I have not a mouthful of food, and we may starve."

His voice is harsh, his manner forbidding. She can scarcely bring herself to believe that this man is her cousin — the easy, gentlemanly, debonnair man of the world she has known in the past.

" You are taking me to my father," she says. " We can exist without food until we reach the camp."

She forces herself to speak calmly, to speak as though she believed him to be conducting her to her parent. She does not remember his cruel words in the cave the previous night. He brutally recalls them.

" I have told you your father is dead," he mutters.

She remembers it all now, and her heart sinks. Her father dead! What fate is in store for her?

" Dead," she murmurs. " How do you know this ?"

He sits upon the ground; she has already done so. She is weary. She feels as if her limbs could not support her.

" I suppose this is as good a time as any to come to an understanding with you," he says, sullenly. " You have got to know it *some* time; I may as well begin now. You ask me how I know your father is dead; I will tell you. Juan Valdoso knew that a sum equivalent to fifty thousand dollars was in the camp. He got it from me. I told him it was to be his reward for certain services rendered. The arrival of Mexican Bill prevented him from getting it into his hands, and so last night a party of men were sent to the camp to kill every one in it, your father in particular, and secure the money."

She shudders as she hears him coolly speaking of this horrible crime.

"Then, he was *not* dead when you told me so last night?"

"No. But I knew the men had been sent to do the work, and I told you so."

"He may not be dead even yet?"

"The bandits will not arrive until night. He dies to-night."

"Then, you have lied twice. You knew this crime was to be perpetrated, and you lied to me, so that I must look upon you as a protector. *You* arranged this murder." She looks him in the eyes. He does not flinch.

"Yes," he says, calmly, "I managed it."

The words came so slowly, so without feeling, that she shudders. Then, with a burst of tears, she throws herself at his feet,

"There may yet be time to save him," she cries. "By forcing on the horses, we may be able to save my father's life. Come, you will do it. Think, he has been kind to you, a father when your own had passed away; he has reared you to manhood, loved you as his own. Come, save him. You cannot wish for his death; you will not suffer his gray hairs to be stained with his life blood. You *will* come."

He looks upon her with cold, indifferent eyes. He has no heart, this calculating scoundrel.

"It would be useless," he replies. "We would never reach the camp in time."

She rises.

"Say rather you will not *try*," she cries, flashing her tearful eyes upon him.

"But hear me, Mordaunt Daggett; God will not permit my father to perish. In some way He will protect him and thwart you. Your villainy shall be made known to the world. I myself will testify against you; for you will be hunted down; you cannot escape. That brave detective who has faced death to rescue me will ferret you out, and you will be led a trembling, pitiful wretch to the bar of justice."

She speaks passionately, hurling her scathing words at him with fierce scorn.

He only smiles.

"Your brave detective is lying a crushed, bleeding mass at the bottom of the ravine," he says.

"I do not fear him; and, as for *your* threats — Bah! Listen. I will unfold to you my plans regarding you."

She staggers, and grasps at a small bush to support her. Mexican Bill dead! Then, all is lost. She hears him speaking.

"I would not be such a fool as to take you where you could denounce me. I know you would not hesitate to do so. I shall go from here to a safe hiding-place, which I accidentally discovered while on my way to Valdoso's caves. I will leave you there, while I go to assure myself that your father is really dead. Then I shall return to you. We shall cross the border into Mexico; I will make you my wife, and place you in charge of some one I can trust. I shall then return to Europe. Being the only heir to the estate of Algernon Daggett, I shall claim the money, and live in splendor the balance of my days. For, remember, I shall take with me proofs of my marriage to you in the form of a certificate, and also of your death. You shall not want. I will send you money regularly; but I will not live with you, and I will take devilish good care that you do not communicate with any one. Can you understand?"

Understand! Only too well.

She sees through it all now. He has plotted for her father's death, to force her to become his wife, in order to possess himself of this fortune. Her heart nearly ceases to beat. She feels as if she would choke from the terrible feeling in her soul. Marry him! Left to die, surrounded by merciless demons! She shrieks aloud in her terror.

"No, no!" she cries. "Do not do this. Do not carry out this devilish scheme. You cannot be entirely heartless. You *once* said you loved me."

He seizes her wrists. His hot breath burns her cheek as he hisses in her ear:

"Yes. I *once* said I loved you. You do well to speak of that. I *did* love you then; but you cast me off, turned from me with scorn. That love died. I *hate* you now. I shall carry out my scheme to the very letter. I shall leave you to die; and perchance, to make assurance doubly sure, *I may kill you!* Do you hear me? I *may* kill you!"

She shrinks from him. She trembles like a delicate flower exposed to the rough, cruel blasts of winter.

"God help me," she murmurs, her brain reeling, her reason tottering on its throne.

"Come! we must be going!" he commands, gruffly.

Mechanically she rises to her feet. Scarcely knowing what she is doing, she allows him to assist her upon the pony, and follows him out into the blazing sun.

No use of trying to escape. She is indeed helpless. They will ride in silence until past noon. She has not looked about her during the ride, keeping her eyes fixed upon the pony's neck. As they halt, she raises them and sees they are beside a towering wall of rock, a solitary moss-covered mass cropping up out of the very prairie. She looks about her. There is no sign of any other rocky substance anywhere visible; no forest, nothing but the boundless prairie, broken only by this peculiar freak of nature.

He orders her to dismount. Mechanically she obeys him. Then, roughly forcing her hands behind her, he binds them together with a handkerchief.

"Brute!" she cries, flushing at the indignity.

"Perhaps," he says, "I am going to make sure that you do not escape me."

He leads her to what appears as a crevice in the rock. As they draw near, she perceives that it is sufficiently wide to admit of a person entering. He pushes her toward this, and, bound as she is, she cannot refuse. She enters, and finds that she is in a small, narrow passage. He forces her along this to a cave at the further end, and then, tying her ankles, using brutal force, he prepares to leave her.

"I shall be gone for about twelve hours," he says. "I regret that I cannot leave you some food; but you know I have none. I suppose your position is an uncomfortable one; but I cannot better it at present. Do not distress yourself by crying out; no one will hear you, and, besides, there may be wild beasts near here, which would be attracted by your cries."

Wild beasts! Her eyes dilate, her breath comes short.

"They might kill me," she cries, "tear me in pieces."

"So much the better," he calmly answers; "then, the only obstacle in my path will be removed, and I shall be spared the trouble of marrying you."

With a sickening feeling of horror, she turns aside her head and closes her eyes. When she reopens them, she is alone — alone in the semi-darkness of the gloomy cave; helpless, bound hand and foot, suffering from the pangs of hunger and thirst, exposed to the savage fury of wild beasts.

"God save me," she cries, in terror.

The hours speed on — long, terrible hours to this poor, helpless one. Night falls; the interior of the cave is as black as the jaws of death. She is suffering acutely now, from the fact of her bonds impeding the free circulation of blood. Her tongue is dry and parched, her head is swimming from weakness. Still, Mordaunt does not return. She gradually dozes off into a troubled slumber, awaking now and then with a sudden start, then closing her eyes again with a shudder. She tries to sleep; she forgets it all while unconscious.

Day dawns once more; the faint light penetrates to the cavern. "He must sure be here," she murmurs.

Suddenly her ears catch the sound of life. *Some one is entering the cave!* some one with shambling footsteps, that disturb the loose pebbles in the passage, and send them bounding into the cavern; one of them strikes her on the face.

With eyes dilated with terror, she watches the entrance. She sees two fiery eyes glaring in upon her; sees a monstrous, fur-coated creature forcing its way in.

Her screams ring out; she shrieks in her fear. The sound of her voice seems to enrage the creature, for it growls, and shambles toward her.

"Father in Heaven! save me," she cries, and faints away, feeling the hot breath of the beast upon her cheeks.

CHAPTER XX.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

WITH a deep-drawn sigh, a gasp for breath, a convulsive upheaval of the bosom, Millicent Daggett recovers consciousness. The white eyelids softly raise, and she sees the tender, anxious look in the dark eyes fixed upon her face; feels the strong arm that holds her tightly, as if to shield her from harm — the eyes, the arm, of Mexican Bill.

"Thank God, you are safe," he murmurs, as he sees she is herself again.

"You saved me?" she asks, in a low, feeble tone.

"Yes. I came just in time. See."

He points to the huge carcass of a monstrous grizzly that lies near him.

"In another minute you would have been torn in ribbons."

She shudders as she realizes how near death she has been.

"How came you here?" she asks.

He tells her all. She hears him through.

"Then, my father is safe — is living?"

"Yes; thank God."

She falls upon her knees (the detective has unbound her), and offers a prayer of thankfulness

to the Ruler of all. Her father is safe. She will soon be in his arms, her head resting upon the loving breast.

"I feel so happy," she cries, through her tears—tears of joy. "And, oh, *so* hungry," she adds.

"I will see that you are supplied with food at once," the detective cries, eagerly. "Our friend here," pointing to the bear, "will furnish fresh meat."

He hurries to the entrance of the cave.

She calls him back.

"I never ate bear's meat," she says, doubtfully.

"Oh, you'll like it. It is the one redeeming feature of the animal," and he hurries out.

She hears him calling some one.

"Ned! come here," she hears his manly voice ringing out.

He returns, accompanied by a handsome young fellow. She notices, for the first time, that one arm is hung in a sling.

"Have you hurt your arm?" she asks, anxiously.

He laughs.

"Oh, scratched it up a little. The bear did not do it," he quickly adds, as he sees her eyes involuntarily glance at the carcass.

"I am *so* sorry," she murmurs.

"Don't worry yourself about it," he cries. "Here, Ned, cut off some choice steaks from Mr. Bear, and broil them. I am slightly hungry myself."

The cowboy sets about his work, and Bill, escorting the girl to the open air, leaves him to build the fire and prepare the meal in the cave. They reach the entrance, and the detective, glancing out over the expanse of prairie, gives utterance to a cry of astonishment, and quickly draws her back out of sight.

"What is it?" she murmurs.

"There is some one coming toward us. By gad! the ponies are in plain sight. They will be sure ——"

She follows the direction of his eyes. Yes. A solitary horseman is rapidly drawing near. They stand and watch the approaching figure for some time; then Bill cries out:

"Pepita! What brings her here?"

He walks out, and waits for the wife of Valdoso to approach. She is still clad in male attire, and is riding rapidly. In five minutes she is by his side, and dismounts. He clasps both her hands in his own.

"What brings you here?" he asks, eagerly.

"Mordaunt Daggett has escaped, and I came to warn you."

She speaks excitedly.

The detective staggers in amazement.

"Escaped! How can that be?"

"He was placed in charge of two of his uncle's teamsters. He must have bribed them; at any rate, an hour after you had gone, he had disappeared; where, no one can offer any explanation."

The detective notices that the face of Millicent has grown deathly pale, she is trembling like a leaf.

"Fear not," he murmurs; "I will protect you."

Pepita glides to her side.

"You remember me, do you not? I am, or was, the wife of Juan Valdoso. You would scarcely recognize me in this garb."

Millicent takes her outstretched hand.

"I am glad to see you," she murmurs.

"We will see that harm does not come to you," cries the Spanish woman. "Your cousin will hardly come here to claim you "

"Breakfast is ready!" announced Ned, from the cave.

"Welcome sound," cries Bill. "I suppose you have your appetite with you?" he asks, roguishly, of Millicent.

"I *think* I can enjoy the meal," she answers.

They enter, and are soon devouring the flesh of the bear, which had so nearly ended the girl's life. The detective is silent during the meal. He is thinking of the news brought by Pepita; wondering where the craven has fled. He does not feel much alarm over the fact, but it makes him furious to think that the scoundrel has managed to get away.

"He must be brought to justice," he thinks. "I will never rest until I hunt him down."

His face reflects his thoughts; for his eyes flash ominously, his brows contract in a frown.

"You are thinking of Mordaunt Daggett,"

whispers Pepita, unheard by Millicent, who is chatting with Ned.

"Yes, the scoundrel!"

"You are eager to bring him to justice?"

"I am impatient to be on my way."

"I have something to tell you before you start upon his track," she says, significantly.

He starts; impressed by her manner.

"Another mystery?" he asks.

"No, a confession."

Millicent turns at this moment, and they say no more.

The meal is finished; they leave the cave. In the shadow of the rocks they rest. The ponies need recuperation; they have traveled far, and the detective knows they will need several hours' rest before they will be in a condition to return.

Millicent, who is worn out by the terrible experiences of the past few days, finds it impossible to keep her gentle eyes open, she is so sleepy.

With a slight laugh, she tells Bill of her feeling, and he spreads a blanket upon the grass, bidding her sleep without fear.

"I am near you," he says.

He stands by her side until the beautiful eyes close, and the soft, regular breathing indicates sound repose; then he turns to Pepita, who is by his side.

"I will hear your confession now," he says, with a light laugh.

She does not join him in the expression of mirth. Her face is grave, her manner disturbed. The cowboy, Ned, is performing some slight task about the saddles, and they are alone.

"It is no light matter," she begins. "The feeling of friendship you have for me now may undergo a change when you hear what I have to say. But remember I did it for the best. I never intended that you should know it, but the circumstances of the past few days have made it necessary for me to tell you."

He looks down upon her in surprise. What is coming?

"Let us sit down," he says. "We need rest."

In the shadow of the rock, they sit down. After a moment's hesitation, she speaks. "You remember the morning I saved you from death at the 'Tower of the Sun.' You told me that you allowed Mordaunt Daggett to escape because he was your cousin. You would not destroy him, because the warm blood of kindred flowed through your veins."

"Yes. I remember."

"You would not have hesitated if it had been otherwise, if he had not been your relation?"

The face of the man grows dark. "No," he answers, sternly. "I would have killed him like a snake."

"*Mordaunt Daggett is not your cousin!*" She speaks earnestly.

He half rises. "Not my cousin! What do you mean?"

"*You are not Hugh Daggett's son.*"

He looks upon her in amazement. "Speak!

Explain!" he cries. "Your husband said so. Even you spoke of it, you spoke of my signing the paper, made mention of my being heir to the fortune."

"True, I said all this; for I knew at that time it would be unwise, extremely dangerous, to speak the truth. I might have allowed you to go on, thinking yourself the son of the man who was murdered by Pietro Alvarez; but all would have been known when the tin box was opened, for in it is my confession, placed there unknown to my husband, who would have killed me if he had known.

"I should have kept my secret until the day of my death, had not Valdoso told you all in his greed to grasp this fortune."

He sees she is speaking earnestly, truthfully. He is eager to hear the rest.

"If I am not Hugh Daggett's son, whose son am I?" he cries.

"You are the son of Don Alfonzo Ascariti, a nobleman of Spain, and my husband. *I am your mother*."

He hears the words, but they seem to him as though coming from afar off. She my mother! He looks up to the sky, out upon the prairie, then turns to her.

She is looking at him wistfully, the large, dark eyes full of love and tenderness.

"I am your mother," she repeats.

He cannot understand.

"How can this be?" he cried, in a maze. She grows sad, grieved because he shows no signs of love, only dumb, anxious curiosity, a desire to be assured.

"I will tell you," she murmurs. "I have told you how my husband, your father, met his death. I need not repeat it. You have also heard that the young wife of Hugh Daggett died in giving birth to a baby boy. We gave it all the care possible, mother Barbara and I; but, despite our nursing and care, the little thing died a few days later. An hour after it had drawn its last feeble breath, I became a mother. I knew it was coming. For months I had carefully concealed the fact from Valdoso. I knew that, in his passion, his hatred for Don Alfonzo, that he would destroy the infant. So I kept it from him. As I lay upon the couch with you, my son, nursing at my breast, with mother Barbara by my side, holding the little corpse of Hugh Daggett's child, the thought came to me that I could keep my child near me by claiming that he was the other, Valdoso not knowing that the infant was dead. I whispered my thoughts to mother Barbara. She agreed to assist me in carrying out my plans. The little dead baby was buried at night, and you grew up as the son of Hugh Daggett, receiving a mother's care by stealth. The rest you know."

Now he begins to realize it. It must be so.

"You forgive me for what I have done," the mother whispers, "forgive me for all these years you have lived in ignorance of your parentage?"

He makes no reply. He is thinking. "I have suffered," he says at last, his voice sounding strange.

"God knows *I* have suffered," she cries. "Is it nothing for a mother to put from her her child? is it nothing to live all these years away from him, knowing he lives, knowing he is eager to hunt down the very man who is his mother's husband; and, yes, even likely to class her with the brute she cannot help but love in spite of all? Is all this nothing, Alfonzo?"

"Alfonzo." He starts.

"I had given you your father's name, even in your infancy."

There is a struggle taking place in his heart, but he cannot long hold out against that eager look in the dark eyes. He rises to his feet, stretches out his uninjured arm.

"I forgive you, mother," he cries, with a glad cry; the beautiful woman is clasped to his breast. The mother has found her son.

The report of a pistol startles them — a pistol-shot and a scream. They turn, and see the cowboy, Ned, holding a smoking revolver in his hand, while, writhing in the agonies of death, at the feet of Millicent Daggett, is the form of the wretched man who had plotted for such high stakes and lost — Mordaunt Daggett.

The girl is bending over him, too horrified to rise to her feet, screaming in a wild, terrified way.

They hurry to him. His eyes are already becoming glazed. He dies, as they look upon his haggard face, without one word.

"I was splicing my lariat," explains Ned, "when I happened to look up, and seen that feller crawling on his belly like a snake toward the gal. He looked like a devil, his eyes were glaring at her. She was sleeping, not knowing anything about it. Suddenly I seen he had a long knife in his hand, he raised it to stab her, and I find I always was a good pistol shot."

Tenderly Pepita raises the screaming, frantic girl and soothes her.

"He meant to kill you," she says.

"I know. But it is *so* horrible," and Millicent turns away with a shudder.

They find a pony grazing on the other side of the rock. He has been ridden by Mordaunt Daggett; he has come upon them unseen.

They bury him upon the prairie, Ned piling some rocks upon the wide grave which he has dug out with knife and hands to prevent the coyotes from digging it up.

The sun is setting in the west as they turn their ponies' heads once more toward the camp.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

It is nearly morning when the little cavalcade drives into camp. Arthur Daggett is sleeping; he is worn out, poor old man, and Bartholomew and Bassett are following his example.

But the clamorous voices of the cowboys, as they welcome the return of their chief, with the girl, awaken them, and soon Millicent is clasped to her father's breast, sobbing for very joy.

In a low tone, Bill relates the sad but merited fate of Mordaunt.

"By Jehoshaphat! he deserved it," cries Bartholomew. Bassett only compresses his lips.

It is a severe blow to the old gentleman. He has loved the boy as a son. His kind old heart aches as he hears of his treachery, proven beyond a doubt, hears of his horrible death.

"There is not one left but you, my darling, to inherit all this wealth," he murmurs to the idol of his heart. "And, when I am gone, the last of our family will have passed away." The sad events of the week have grieved him sorely. He turns away from the group, leading his child by the hand.

He wishes to be alone with her. Camp is broken up as soon as possible. It has been the scene of crime and bloodshed, and all are eager to leave it and its painful memories behind. They travel by easy stages to Santa Fé, and, once more beneath a civilized roof, Bassett feels himself again, while Bartholomew smokes his cigar with greater complacence. The tin box is opened. The detective, who is present, takes possession of the paper which contains his brother's confessions. It is not necessary for the world to know his story. The contents of the box prove, beyond doubt, the death of Hugh Daggett, if further proof were necessary, and, after lingering a few weeks at the commodious hotel, Arthur Daggett takes the train for

New York, on his way to England, accompanied by his daughter and Isaac Bassett.

Mexican Bill presses a fond kiss upon the lips of the fair Millicent as the train moves out of the station. No one objects; it has all been settled. The father has given his consent to the marriage of Don Alfonzo Ascariti and his daughter. The detective has informed him of his rank and title, withholding from him, however, the manner in which he obtained his information.

He is to be in London in two months. He has business to transact in Spain before his marriage.

The train moves out, and Bartholomew grasps the hand of the brave detective as it is lost to view.

"Well, it is all settled, old fellow, and, by Jehoshaphat! you are in luck. How's your arm?"

"Coming on finely. I leave for Spain to-morrow."

"Good luck to you."

He leaves him.

But why write further? You know how these things end. You know how Mexican Bill succeeded. The hero of a novel always succeeds in the end. He marries the heroine, and lives happy ever after.

Mexican Bill married Millicent Daggett, and, at the death of her father, succeeded to the vast fortune of Algernon Daggett; and, I might say, he made good use of it.

FINIS.

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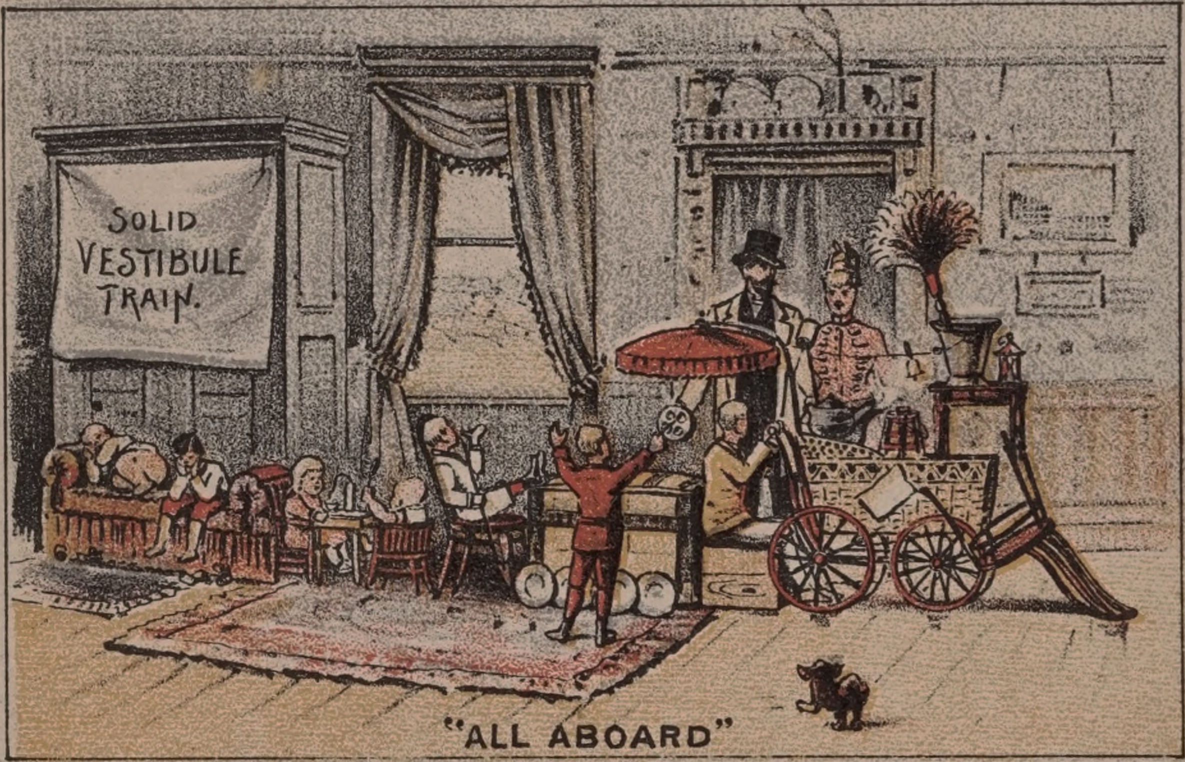

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